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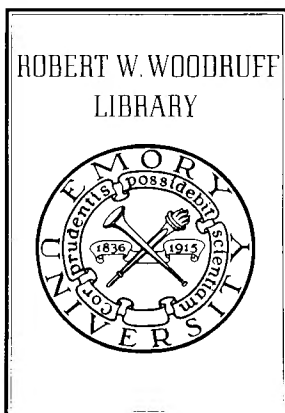
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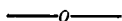
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BROKEN TO HARNESS.



CHAPTER I.

MR. CHURCHILL'S IDEAS ARE MONASTIC.

THE office of the *Statesman* daily journal was not popular with the neighbours, although its existence unquestionably caused a diminution of rent in its immediate proximity. It was very difficult to find—which was an immense advantage to those connected with it, as no one had any right there but the affiliated; and strangers burning to express their views, or to resent imaginary imputations cast upon them, had plenty of time to cool down while they wandered about the adjacent lanes in vain quest of their object. If you had business there, and were not thoroughly acquainted with the way, your best plan was to take a sandwich in your pocket, to prepare for an afternoon's campaign, and then to turn to the right out of Fleet Street, down any street leading to the river, and to wander about until you quite unexpectedly came upon your destination. There you found it, a queer, dumpy, black-looking old building,—like a warehouse that had been sat upon and compressed,—nestling down in a quaint little dreary square, surrounded by the halls of Worshipful Companies which had never been heard of save by their own Livcrymen, and large churches with an average congregation of nine, standing mildewed and blue-mouldy, with damp voters'-notices peeling off their doors, and green streaks down the stuccoed heads of the angels and cherubim supporting the dripping arch

over the porch, in little dank reeking churchyards, where the rank grass overtopped the broken tombstones, and stuck nodding out through the dilapidated railing.

The windows were filthy with the stains of a thousand showers; the paint had blistered and peeled off the heavy old door, and round the gaping chasm of the letter-box; and in the daytime the place looked woebegone and deserted. Nobody came there till about two in the afternoon, when three or four quiet-looking gentlemen would drop in one by one, and after remaining an hour or two, depart as they had come. But at night the old house woke up with a roar; its windows blazed with light; its old sides echoed to the creaking throes of a huge steam-engine; its querulous bell was perpetually being tugged; boys in paper caps and smeary faces and shirt-sleeves were perpetually issuing from its portals, and returning, now with fluttering slips of paper, now with bibulous refreshment. Messengers from the Electric Telegraph Companies were there about every half-hour; and cabs that had dashed up with a stout gentleman in spectacles dashed away with a slim gentleman in a white hat, returning with a little man in a red beard, and flying off with the stout gentleman again. Blinds were down all round the neighbourhood; porters of the Worshipful Companies, sextons of the congregationless churches, agents for printing-ink and Cumberland black-lead, wood-engravers, box-block sellers, and the proprietors of the Never-say-die or Health-restoring Drops, who held the corner premises,—were all sleeping the sleep of the just, or at least doing the best they could towards it, in spite of the reverberation of the steam-engine at the office of the *Statesman* daily journal.

On a hot night in September Mr. Churchill sat in a large room on the first-floor of the *Statesman* office. On the desk before him stood a huge battered old despatch-box, overflowing with papers—some in manuscript, neatly folded and docketed; others long printed slips, scored and marked all over with ink-corrections. Immediately in front of him hung an almanac and a packet of half-sheets

of note-paper, strung together on a large hook. A huge waste-paper basket by his side was filled, while the floor was littered with envelopes of all sizes and colours, fragments cut from newspapers, ink-splashes, and piles of books in paper parcels waiting for review. A solemn old clock, pointing to midnight, ticked gravely on the mantelpiece; a small library of grim old books of reference, in solemn brown bindings, with the flaming cover of the Post-Office Directory like a star in the midst of them, was ranged against the wall; three or four speaking tubes, with ivory mouthpieces, were curling round Mr. Churchill's feet; and Mr. Churchill himself was reading the last number of the *Revue des Deux Mondes* by the light of a shaded lamp, when a heavy hand was laid on his shoulder, and a cheery voice said,

"Still at the mill, Churchill? still at the mill?"

"Ah, Harding, my dear fellow, I'm delighted to see you!"

"I should think you were," said Harding, laughing; "for my presence here means a good deal to you,—bed, and rest, and country, eh? Well, how have you been?—not knocked up? You've done capitally, my boy! I've watched you carefully, and am more than content." (For Mr. Harding was the editor of the *Statesman*, and Churchill, one of his principal contributors, had been taking his place while he made holiday.)

"That's a relief," said Churchill. "I've been rather nervous about it; but I thought that Tooby and I between us had managed to push the ship along somehow. Tooby's a capital fellow!"

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Harding, seating himself; "Tooby is a capital fellow, and there's not a better 'sub' in London. But Tooby couldn't have written that article on the Castle-Hedingham dinner, or shown up the *Teaser's* blunders in classical quotation, Master Frank. *Palmarum quæ meruit*. Who did the Bishops and the Crystal Palace?"

"Oh, Slummer wrote those. Weren't they good?"

"Very smart; very smart indeed. A thought too strong of Billingsgate, though. That young man is a very hard hitter, but wants training. Where's Hawker?"

"Just gone. He's been very kind and very useful, so have Williams and Burke, and all. And you—how have you enjoyed yourself?"

"Never so much in my life. I've read nothing but the paper. I've done nothing but lie upon the beach and play with the children."

"And the children—are they all right? and Mrs. Harding?"

"Splendid! I never saw the wife look so well for the last six years. She sent all kind remembrances to you, and the usual inquiry."

"What! if I was going to be married? No, no; you must take back my usual answer. She must find me a wife, and it must be one after her own pattern."

"Seriously, Frank Churchill, it's time you began to look after a wife. In our profession, especially, it's the greatest blessing to have some one to care for and to be petted by in the intervals of business-strife. There used to be a notion that a literary man required to be perpetually 'seeing life,' which meant 'getting drunk, and never going home;' but that's exploded, and I believe that our best character-painters owe half their powers of delineation to their wives' suggestions. Women,—by Jove, sir!—women read character wonderfully."

"Mrs. Harding has made a bad shot at mine, old friend," said Churchill, laughing, "if she thinks that I am in any way desirous to be married. No, no! So far as the seeing life is concerned, I began early, and all that has been over long since. But I've got rather a queer temper of my own. I'm not the most tolerant man in the world; and I've had my own way so long, that any little missy fal-lals and pettishness would jar upon me horribly. Besides, I've not got money enough to marry upon. I like my comforts, and to be able to buy occasional books and pictures, and to keep my horse, and my club, and—"

"Well, but a fellow like you might pick up a woman with money!" said Harding.

"That's the **worst** pick-up possible,—to have to be

civil to your wife's trustees, or listen to reproaches as to how 'poor papa's money' is being spent. No, no, no! So long as my dear old mother lives, I shall have a decent home; and afterwards—well, I shall go into chambers, I suppose, and settle down into a club-haunting old fogey."

"Stuff, Frank; don't talk such rubbish. Affectation of cynicism and affectation of premature age are two of the most pernicious cants of the day. Very likely now at the watering-place to which you're going for your holiday, you'll meet some pretty girl who—"

"Watering-place!" cried Frank, shouting with laughter; "I'm going to my old godfather's country place for some partridge-shooting; and as he's an old bachelor of very peculiar temper, there's not likely to be much womankind about."

"Ho, ho! A country place, eh? and partridge-shooting? Hum, hum! We're coming out. Don't get your head turned with grand people, Frank."

"Grand people!" echoed Churchill. "Don't I tell you the man's my godfather? There will probably be half a dozen men staying in the house, whose sole care about me will be that I carry my gun properly, and don't hit them out in the stubble."

"When do you go?"

"To-morrow, by the midday express. I've some matters to settle in the morning, and can't get down before dinner-time."

"Well, then, get to bed at once. I've got to say a few words to Tooby; and I'll see Marks when he comes up with the statement, and take care that all's straight. You've seen your own proofs? Very well, then; God bless you! and be off, and don't let us see your face for a month."

They shook hands warmly; and as Churchill left the room, Harding called after him, "Two things, Frank: look out for a nice wife, and don't get your head turned with what are called 'swells.'"

Throughout London town there breathed no simpler-

mined man than George Harding. At College, as in after-life, he had lived with a very small set, entirely composed of men of his own degree in the world; and of any other he had the vaguest possible notion. His intellectual acquirements were great, and his reading was vast and catholic; but of men and cities he had seen literally nothing; and as, except in his annual vacation, when he could go down with his family and potter about the quietest of watering-places, he never went any where save from his home to the *Statesman* office, and from the *Statesman* office to his home, he was not likely to enlarge his knowledge of life. Occasionally, on a Saturday night in the season, he would get the Opera-box from the musical critic, and would take Mrs. Harding to Her Majesty's; but there his whole attention would be absorbed in contemplating the appearance and manners of the "swells,"—the one word not to be found in the dictionary which he sometimes indulged in. Slightly Radical in his opinions was George Harding; and that he was not much gratified by his observation of these specimens of the upper ten thousand, was to be traced in certain little pungencies and acerbities in his leading articles after these Opera visits. He worshipped his calling, in his own honest, simple, steadfast way, and resented, quietly but sturdily, any attempts at what he considered patronage by those of higher social rank. The leaders of his political party, recognisant of the good service done to them by Harding's pen, had, on several occasions, essayed to prove their gratitude by little set civilities: huge cards of invitation to Lady Helmsman's Saturday-evening *réunions* had found their way to the *Statesman's* deep-mouthed letter-box; carriage-paid hampers of high-flavoured black game sped thither from the Highland shooting-box, where the Foreign Secretary was spending his hard-earned holiday; earliest intimation of political changes, in "confidential" covers, were conveyed there by Downing-Street messengers. But George Harding never appeared at Protocol House; his name was never seen low down amongst those of the Foreign-Office clerks

and outer selvage of fashion, chronicled with such urbanity by Mr. Henchman of the *High-Life Gazette*; and no attention or flattery ever made him pander to a shuffle, or register a lie. He had a very high opinion of Churchill's talents and honour; but he knew him to be fond of praise, and, above all, greatly wanting in discretion. Harding had seen so many men full of promise fall into the dreary vortex of drink and debt and pot-house dissipation, that he had hailed with delight the innate decency and gentlemanly feeling which had kept Frank Churchill out of such dirty orgies; but now he feared lest the disinfectant might prove even worse than the disease itself, and lest the aristocratic notions, which his friend undoubtedly possessed, might lead him into society where his manliness and proper pride might be swallowed up in the effulgency of his surroundings.

So mused George Harding, bending over the dingy old grate at the *Statesman* office, and gazing vacantly at the shavings with which it was filled, while waiting for Mr. Marks, the head printer, to bring him the "statement," showing the amount required to fill the paper. Meanwhile Churchill, cigar in mouth, was striding through the deserted streets, rejoicing in the thought of his coming holiday, and inwardly chuckling over his friend's warnings. At last he stopped at a door in a dull respectable street leading out of Brunswick Square, let himself in with a latch-key, drank a tumbler of soda-water, and glanced at the addresses of some letters in his little dining-room, exchanged his boots for slippers at the bottom of the staircase, and crept slowly up the stairs. As he arrived at the second floor, he paused for a minute, and a voice said, "God bless you, Frank!"

"God bless you, mother!" he replied; "good night, dear;" and passed into his room.

Then he sat himself on the side of his bed, and began leisurely to undress himself, smiling meanwhile.

"Bring back a wife, and beware of swells, eh? That is the essence of Harding's advice. No, no, my darling old mother; you and I get on too well together to change

our lives. An amusing time a wife would have with me, —out half the night at the office, and she shivering in the dining-room waiting my return. Wife, by Jove! Yes; and thick fat chops, and sixteen-shilling trousers, and the knifeboard of the omnibus instead of the cob to ride on! No; I think not. And as for swells—that old republican, Harding, thinks every man with a handle to his name is an enemy to Magna Charta. I should like to show him my old godfather walking into an idiotic peer of the realm!”

And, very much tickled at the idea, Churchill put out his candle and turned in.

CHAPTER II.

DOWN AT BISSETT.

AT the very first sign of the season's breaking up, Sir Marmaduke Wentworth was in the habit of leaving his town-house in Curzon Street, and proceeding to his country-seat of Bissett Grange. Gumble, his butler and body-servant, was the first person officially informed of the intended flight; but long before his master spoke to him, that far-seeing man had made up his mind, and arranged his plans accordingly. "Flitherses gone to-day, eh!" he would say to himself, as, in the calm, cool evening, he lounged against the jams of the street-door (Gumble was never seen in the area) and looked up to the opposite house. "Shutters up, and Flitherses hoff! Some German bath or other, no doubt; elber-shakin' for the old man, and forrin' counts for the young ladies. Lord Charles leff last week; he'll be takin' his rubber at Spaw now as nateral as at the Club. The old Barrin has been sent away somewheres; and I'll bet a pound in two days my guv'nor says 'Hoff!'" And he would have won his bet. So soon as there was the slightest appearance of a move among the people of his circle; so soon as he found "shall have left town" given as an answer to an invite to one of his cosey little dinners; before Goodwood afforded the pleasantest excuse for the laziest of racing and the happiest of lunching; while flannel-clad gentlemen yet perspired copiously at Lord's, defending the wickets of Marylebone against the predatory incursions of "Perambulators" or "Eccentrics;" when Finsburyites were returning from their fortnight at Ramsgate, and while Dalstonians yet lingered on the pier at Southend,—old Marmaduke Wentworth would give his household brigade

the order to retreat, and, at their head, would march down upon Bissett Grange.

And he was right; for there was not a nobler old house, nor prettier grounds, in the broad county of Sussex, where it stood. Contrast is the great thing, after all: tall men marry short women; the most thick-set nursery-maids struggle a-tiptoe to keep step with the lengthiest members of the Foot-Guards; Plimnims the poet, who is of the Sybarite-roseleaf order, sighs for Miss Crupper the *écuyère*, who calls a horse an oss, and a donkey a hass; and so you, if you had been staying at Brighton, and had gone on an excursion at half-a-crown an hour into the inner country, would have fallen in love with Bissett Grange. For, weary of the perpetual hoarse murmur of the sea, now thundering its rage in tremendous waves, now shrieking its lamentation in long hissing back currents; sick of the monotony of the "long-backed bushless downs," so cold and bare and wind-swept, echoing to the eternal plaint of the curlew, and shutting off the horizon with a dreary never-ending shoulder-blade of blank turf,—you, if you were lucky in your choice, and had a driver with a soul beyond the Steine and aspirations exceeding the Lewes Road, would have come upon, at a distance of some five miles from Brighton, a little one-storied porter's lodge, nestling in ivy so deep that the dear parasite had it in its embrace, chimneys and all. Big, heavy, and wooden were the lodge-gates; none of your pretty, light, elegant Coalbrookdale innovations. Gates, in Sir Marmaduke Wentworth's idea, were things to keep impertinent prying people out; and as such they could not be made too cumbrous or too opaque for his pleasure. They were very high as well as very heavy; so, if you had come with your 'cute driver in your fly excursion, you would have seen nothing but the quaint twisted chimneys; and even for that view you must have mounted unto the box. Save the friends of the owner, no one, in Marmaduke Wentworth's time, had ever passed the lodge, or rather, I should say, reached the house. Visitors to

Brighton and Worthing, dying of *ennui*, had besieged the lodge, and implored permission to walk in the grounds; artists had asked to be allowed to sketch the house; a "gentleman engaged upon the press" had written to say that he was sure there must be a legend connected with some chamber, if he might only be permitted to explore the mansion; and one man, a photographer, bribed the lodge-keeper's grand-daughter with a piece of elecampane, and, in the absence of the legitimate portress, passed the gate. He had proceeded about a couple of hundred yards up the avenue, when he was met by Sir Marmaduke, who had just turned out for his leisurely afternoon ride. The sight of the itinerant professor with his travelling camera roused the old gentleman in an instant; he set spurs to his cob, hurried off to the intruder, and tapped him smartly on the back with his whip. One instant's glance revealed to him the whole affair: it was *not* a travelling Punch, whom he would have sent into the kitchen; it was *not* a man from the Missionary Society, whom he would have had ducked in the pond; it was—*tant soit peu*—an artist; and for art of any kind, however humble, old Marmaduke had a regard. So when the trembling man looked up, and, divided between a notion of "cheeking the swell," or being impudent, and running away, or being cowardly, hit upon a middle course, and, guarding his head, at which nothing had been aimed, exclaimed, "Now, then! What are you at? Who's hurting you?" all the old gentleman did was to bend from his saddle, to seize the intruder by the lobe of his ear, to turn him completely round, and, pointing to the gate, to utter in a hissing whisper the phrase "Go away, man!"

When the photographer attempted to explain, the ear-pressure was intensified, and the "Go away, man!" uttered more loudly; at the third repetition, the photographer wrung his ear from the old gentleman's fingers, and ran away abjectly.

"Collodion and Clumpsoles; or, the Homes of the British Aristocracy in the Camera: being Reminiscences

of a Peripatetic Photographer," therefore, contained no view of Bissett Grange; which was to be regretted, as neither The Hassocks, the Rector's residence, nor The Radishes, the seat of Sir Hipson Hawes, the lord of the manor, both of which figured extensively in the photographic publication, was to be compared with Marmaduke Wentworth's ancestral mansion. The elm-avenue extended from the lodge to the house,—nearly half a mile,—and through the trees you saw the broad expanse of the park, covered with that beautiful soft turf which is in the highest perfection in Sussex, and which afforded pasture for hundreds of dappled deer, who would raise their heads at the sound of approaching footsteps or carriage-wheels, and, after peering forward earnestly with outstretched necks at the intrusion, would wheel round and start off at a peculiar sling trot, gradually merging into the most graceful of gallops.

Immediately in front of the porch, and only divided from it by the carriage-sweep, was an enormous flower-bed, sloping towards the sides, and culminating in the centre,—the pride of the head-gardener's soul. Right and left of the house were two arches, exactly alike. Passing through that to the left, you came upon the stables and coach-houses, of which there is little to be said, save that they were old-fashioned, and what the helpers called "ill-convenient;" and that the fine London grooms who came down with their master's hacks and carriage-horses in the autumn—Sir Marmaduke was never at Bissett during the hunting season—used to curse them freely as a set of tumbledown old sheds, fit only for jobs and fly-'osses. And yet the old quadrangle, environed by the stable-buildings, with their red-tiled roofs and their slate-coloured half-hatch doors, each duly bearing its horse-shoe and its hecatomb of mouse and stoat skeletons, was picturesque, more especially of an evening, when the setting sun gleamed on the quaint old clock-turret, ivy-covered and swallow-haunted, and steeped in a rich crimson glow the pretty cottage of old Martin, erst head-groom, now a superannuated pensioner

—old Martin, who was never so happy as when babbling of bygone days, and who “minded the time” when the stables were full of blood horses, and when Master Marmaduke (the present proprietor) rode Saucy Sally over all the raspers in the county.

Through the other arch you came upon the gardens of the Grange. Immediately before you lay a broad expanse of lawn,—such smooth, soft turf as is only met with in England, and only there in well-to-do places. Short, crisp, and velvety was the grass, kept with the greatest care, and rolled and mown with the most un-deviating punctuality; for Sir Marmaduke was proud of his lawn, and liked to sit out there in his high-backed rustic seat on the hot August evenings, placidly smoking his cigar, and occasionally raising his head to be fanned by the soft sea-breeze which came blowing over the neighbouring downs. He would as soon have thought of allowing a servant to take a liberty with him as of permitting any one to drive a croquet-iron into that lawn, or to attempt to play any game on it. Between the house and the lawn ran a broad gravelled walk, passing down which you came upon the orchard and upon the fig-garden, which was the glory of the county, and was enclosed with an old red-brick wall, which itself looked ripe and ruddy. To the right lay the kitchen-garden,—a fertile slope of land in the highest state of cultivation, dotted every here and there with huge lights and frames, and spread nets, and overgrown cucumbers, and bursting marrows; for though Sir Marmaduke cared but little for flowers, he was a great fruit-grower, and, next to seeing his pines and melons on his own table (where, glowing on the old ancestral Wentworth plate, they looked like a study for Lance), his great gratification was to bear away with them the prizes from the Horticultural Shows in the neighbourhood. Beyond the orchard was a large field, known as the Paddock, whither the croquet-players and the archers were relegated, and where the turf was almost as smooth as that of the sacred lawn itself. Over all,—house, lawn, orchard,

kitchen-garden, and paddock, and far away across the surrounding downs—there was a delicious sense of calm and quiet; a feeling which was heightened rather than lessened by the inhabitants of a rookery established in the tall elm-trees bordering the Paddock, and who, as they sailed over the grounds of the Grange, would express their approbation by one single solemn caw.

The house faced the avenue, and was a queer, odd, square block, by no means picturesque, but quaintly ugly something like an old-fashioned child, whose decidedly curious features, out of all drawing and impossible to be admired, yet have something humorously lovable in their expression. A staring red-brick house of Queen Anne's time, that ought to have been formal, and perhaps had been at some period or other, but which had undergone so many changes—had had so many gables put on here, and windows let in there, and rooms added on wherever they were wanted—as to lose all trace of its original design, and to have become of a composite style of architecture which would have driven Mr. Ruskin mad. It was the only gentleman's seat for miles round which was built of red brick, and not that gray stone which always looks weather-beaten and time-worn; instead of which, the Grange had a jolly, cheery, comic expression, and when the sun gleamed on its little diamond-shaped, leaden-casemented windows, they seemed to twinkle like the eyes of a genial red-faced old gentleman at some good joke or pleasant dish. A comfortable old house in every sense of the word, with an enormous number of rooms, large airy spacious chambers, queer little nooks and snuggeries, long passages with pannelled partitions dividing them from other passages, partitions with occasional square windows or round eyelet-holes cut in them, wide straggling staircases with broad steps and broad balustrades, which no boy had ever yet been known to pass without sliding down them on his stomach. A couple of queer turreted chambers, like the place where the yard-measure lives in old-fashioned work-boxes, and a set of attics, low-roofed, and rather worm-eaten and mouldy-

smelling. These were not inhabited, for the servants had their own quarters in the western wing; a bit of eccentric building, which had been thrown out long after the original structure, and gave to the old mansion, from the back view, a comical lopsided appearance; and when the rest of the house was filled, the bachelors were sent to what was known as the Barracks, or the Kennel, a series of jolly little rooms shut out from the respectable portion of the building by a long passage, where they kept up their own fun till a very late hour of the night, where there was always an overhanging smell of tobacco, and whence, in the early mornings, there came such a roaring and clanging of shower-baths, and such a sound of hissing and sluicing and splashing, that you might have fancied yourself in the vicinity of an army of Tritons.

Two o'clock on a hot afternoon at the end of September; and, with the exception of a few sportsmen, who are now reclining under a high hedge and lighting pipes, after a succulent repast of game-pie, cold partridge, and bitter beer, all the party at the Grange is assembled round the luncheon-table in the dining-room. That is Marmaduke Wentworth, the tall old man standing on the hearth-rug, with his back towards the empty fire-grate. His head is perfectly bald and shining, and has but a fringe of crisp white hair; his features are what is called "aristocratic," well-shaped, and comely; his eyes are cold, clear, gray; his lips slightly full, and his teeth sound and regular. He is in his invariable morning dress,—a blue coat with brass buttons, a buff waistcoat, and gray trousers with gaping dog's-eared pockets, into which his hands are always plunged. Looking at him now, you would scarcely recognise the *roué* of George the Fourth's time, the Poins to the wild Prince, the hero of a hundred intrigues and escapades. In heat and turmoil, in drinking, dicing, and dancing, Marmaduke Wentworth passed his early youth; and from this debauchery he was rescued by the single passion of his life. The object of that passion—his cousin, a lovely girl, whose innocence won the

dissipated roisterer from his evil ways, and gave him new notions and new hopes—died within three months of their engagement; and from that day Wentworth became another man. He went abroad, and for ten years led a solitary studious life; returning to England, he brought with him his bookworm tastes; and it was long before he emerged from the seclusion of Bissett Grange, which he had inherited, and returned once more to London life. Even then, he sought his society in a very different set to that in which he had previously shone. George the Great was dead; sailor King William had followed him to the grave; and the new men fluttering round the court of the new Queen, setting fashions and issuing social ordinances, had been cradled children when Marmaduke Wentworth had copied Brummel's cravats, or listened to Alvanley's *bons mots*. Even had he continued a "dandy," he would have been displeased with the "swells" to whom the dandies had given place; and now, changed as he was into a disappointed elderly gentleman, with a bitter tongue and an intolerant spirit, his unsocial cynicism bored the new men, while their slangy flippancy disgusted him. So, in the phrase of the day, he "went in for a new excitement;" and, though his name and his appearance were as well known in London as those of the Duke of Wellington, there were but few people of his own status or time of life who were retained on an intimate footing. Some few old friends, who themselves had suffered heart-shipwreck, or seen their argosies of early feelings go down in sight of port, claimed companionship with the querulous, crotchety companion of their youth, and had their claims allowed. His odd, quaint savagery, his utter contempt for the recognised laws of politeness, his free speaking, and his general eccentricity, had a great charm for young people of both sexes; and if they had any thing in them to elevate them above the ordinary run of yea-and-nay young persons, they invariably found their advances responded to. Then there was a great attraction for young people in the society which they met at one of Marmaduke's dinners,—

men whose names were before the world ; an occasional cabinet-minister sweetening the severities of office with a little pleasant relaxation in company where he might take the mask from his face and the gag from his mouth ; authors of note ; rising artists ; occasionally an actor or two,—all these were to be found round Wentworth's table. The old gentleman was in London from January to July. During that time he gave four dinner-parties a week (one of them, I regret to say, and generally the pleasantest, on a Sunday), and during the other three days dined out. He was a member of the True-Blue and the Minerva Clubs, but seldom went to either ; he was admissible by the hall-porter of every theatre in London, and sometimes strayed behind the scenes and took possession of the green-room hearthrug, whence he vented remarkably free and discriminating criticisms on the actors and actresses surrounding him. He had one special butt, an old German baron of fabulous age, who was supposed to have been a page to Frederick the Great, who had been for thirty years in England, and had only acquired the very smallest knowledge of its language, and whose power of placidly enduring savage attacks was only equalled by the vigour of his appetite. The Baron was never brought down to Bissett ; but, as we have heard from Gumble, was sent off to some seaside place to recruit his digestion ; whence he invariably turned up again in Curzon Street in January, with the same wig, the same dyed beard, the same broken English, and an appetite, if any thing, improved by his marine sojourn.

There is a strange medley now collected at the Grange. That tall girl, seated at the far end of the table, with her chin leaning on her hand, is Barbara Lexden. Three years ago, when, at nineteen, she was presented, she created a *furor* ; and even now, though her first freshness is gone, she is even more beautiful—has rounded and ripened, and holds her own with the best in town. More *distingué*-looking than beautiful, though, is Barbara. Her face is a little too long for perfect oval ; her nose is very slightly aquiline, with delicately curved, thin, transparent

nostrils; her forehead marked with two deep lines, from a curious trick of elevating her eyebrows when surprised, and shaded with broad thick masses of dark-brown hair, bound tightly round her head, taken off behind her ears,—small, and glistening like pink shells,—and terminating in a thick plaited clump; sleepy, greenish-gray eyes, with long drooping lashes; a tall, undulating, pear-shaped figure, always seen to best advantage in a tight-fitting dress, with a neat little collar and nun-like simple linen cuffs; a swimming walk; feet and ankles beyond compare; and hands—ah, such hands!—not plump, slender, with long fingers, and rosy filbert nails; such hands as Ninon de l'Enclos might have had, but such as, save on Barbara, I have only seen in wax, on black velvet, under a glass case, modelled from Lady Blessington's, and purchased at the Gore-House Sale. Blue was her favourite colour, violet her favourite perfume, admiration the longing of her soul. She was never happy until every one with whom she was brought into contact had given in their submission to her. No matter of what age or in what condition of life, all must bow. Once, during a Commemoration Week at Oxford, she completely turned various hoary heads of houses, and caused the wife of an eminent Church dignitary, after thirty years of happy marriage, to bedew her pillow with tears of bitter jealousy at seeing how completely the courteous old dean was fascinated by the lovely visitor; and she would laugh with saucy triumph as she heard the blunt, outspoken admiration of working-men as she sat well forward in the carriage blocked up in St. James's Street on a Drawing-room day, or slowly creeping along the line of vehicles which were "setting down" at the Horticultural-Gardens gates.

With the exception of flirtation, in which she would have taken the highest honours, her accomplishments were neither more nor less than those of most women of her position. She played brilliantly, with a firm, dashing touch, and sang, perhaps not artistically, but with an amount of feeling thrown into her deep contralto that

did frightful execution; her French was very good; her German passable, grammatical, and well phrased, but lacking the real rough accent and guttural smack. At all events, she had made the most of what schooling she had had, for it was desultory enough. Her father, the youngest son of a good family, ran away with the black-eyed, ruddy-cheeked daughter of the Herefordshire parson with whom he went to read during the Long Vacation; was immediately disinherited by his father; left the University, and by the influence of his family got into a Government office; where, by his own exertions, he got into bad company, into debt, and into prison. On his deathbed he commended his wife and daughter to the care of his elder sister, who had never married, but lived very comfortably on the property which ought to have been his. Miss Lexden came once to see her brother's widow and orphan in the lodgings which they had taken in Lambeth to be near the King's Bench Prison. But years of trouble had not changed the poor mother for the better, and her stately sister-in-law regarded her with horror. In truth, the colour had faded from her rosy cheeks, and the light died out of her black eyes long ago, and had left her a dowdy, silly, fussy little woman, with nothing to say. So Miss Lexden thought she could best fulfil her brother's charge with least trouble to herself by allowing the bereaved ones fifty pounds a year; and on this, and what she could make by working for the Berlin-wool and fancy-stationery shops, the widow supported herself and her child for some twelve years, when she died. Miss Lexden then took the child to the dull, stately old house in Gloucester Place, Portman Square; where, with the aid of a toady, the daily visit of a smug physician, an airing in a roomy old carriage drawn by a couple of fat horses, a great deal of good eating and drinking, and a tolerable amount of society, she managed to lead a jolly godless old life. She found her niece, then fourteen years old, less ignorant and more presentable than she had imagined; for Barbara had received from her mother a sound English education, and had, on

the pea-and-pigeon principle, picked up a little French and the rudiments of music. She looked and moved like a lady, and moreover had an insolence of manner, a *de haut en bas* treatment of nearly every body, which the old lady hailed as a true Lexden characteristic, and rejoiced over greatly. So Barbara was sent to Paris for three years, and came back at seventeen finished in education, ripened in beauty, and a thorough coquette at heart. Of course she had already had several *affaires*: several with the professors attached to the Champs-Élysées *pension*; one with an Italian count, who bribed the ladies'-maid to convey notes, and who was subsequently thrashed and instructed in the *savate* by the Auvergnat porter of the establishment; and one with an English gentleman coming over from Boulogne; and her aunt used to encourage her to tell of these, and would laugh at them until the tears came into her eyes.

At nineteen she was presented, made her *coup*, and now for two seasons had been a reigning belle. Offers she had had in plenty,—youthful peers with slender incomes; middle-aged commoners, solemn, wealthy, and dull; smug widowers, hoping to renew the sweets of matrimony, and trusting to bygone experience to keep clear of its bitters. But Barbara refused them all; played with them, landed them,—giving them all the time the most pleasurable sensations of encouragement, as old Izaak used to tickle trout,—and then flung them back, bruised and gasping, into that muddy stream the world. She told her aunt she was playing for a high stake; that she did not care for any of these men; that she did not think she ever should care for any one; under which circumstances she had better make the best bargain of herself, and go at a high price. There are plenty of women like this. We rave against cruel parents and sordid Mammon-matches; but very often the parents are merely passive in the matter. There are plenty of girls who have walnuts, or peach stones, or something equally im-pressible, where their hearts should be, who have never experienced the smallest glimmer of love, and who look

upon the possession of a carriage and an Opera-box, and admission into high society, as the acme of human enjoyment.

Sitting next to Barbara is Fred Lyster, a slim, dark man, with small regular features and a splendid flowing black beard. He was educated at Addiscombe, and was out in India under Gough and Outram; did good service, was highly thought of, and was thoroughly happy; when his old godfather died, and left him heir to a property of three thousand a year. He returned at once to England, and became the most idle, purposeless, dreamiest of men. He had tried every thing, and found it all hollow. He had travelled on the Continent, been on the turf, gambled in stocks and railways, kept a yacht, and was bored by each and all. He had thought of going into Parliament, and went for two nights into the Speaker's Gallery; but did not pursue the idea, because he found that "the fellows talked so much." His plaintive moans against life were sources of intense amusement to his friends; and when he discovered this—which he did at once, being a very long way from a fool—he was not in the least annoyed, but rather lent himself to the idea, and heightened his expressions of *ennui* and despondency. He liked to be with Sir Marmaduke; for the old gentleman's brusque manners and general intolerance afforded him real amusement, and he laid himself open to attack by always being more than ever drawling and inane when in his company. The baronet, who had a quick perception of character, knew Lyster's real worth, and often talked to him seriously about having some purpose in life; and when he only got vague and dreamy replies, he would burst out into a torrent of invective, in the middle of which Lyster would run, shrieking with laughter, from the room.

Next to Captain Lyster sits Miss Lexden, Barbara's aunt; a fat, placid-looking old lady, in a flaxen front, which, with a cap covered with ribbons and flowers, seemed skewered on to her skull by a couple of large pins, the knobs of which presented themselves like bosses

on her temples. She was a cousin of Sir Marmaduke's, and the elder sister of the old man's one love, so that there was a great link of confidence between them; and she liked coming to Bissett, where the living was always so good, and where she met people who amused her. That pretty girl talking to her is Miss Townshend,—a delicious creature in a country-house, who can ride across country, and play croquet and billiards, and sing little French *chansons*, and dance, and who even has been known on occasions to drive a dogcart and smoke a cigarette. To secure her, entails inviting her father, an intensely respectable, dreary old gentleman—that is he, in the starched check cravat and the high coat-collar; a City magnate, who confines his reading to the City article, and has to be promptly extinguished when he attempts to talk about the “policy of Rooshia.” He is endeavouring just now to strike up a conversation with his neighbour Mr. Vincent, the member for Wessex, and Chairman of the Dinner-Committee of the House of Commons; but Mr. Vincent is deep in the discussion of a cheese-omelette, and is telegraphing recommendation thereof to Mrs. Vincent, a merry, red-faced looking little woman, who, with her husband, passed her whole life in thinking about good eating. Sir Marmaduke's solicitor, Mr. Russell, a quiet old gentleman, clad in professional black, who was always trying to hide his soft wrinkled hands under his ample coat-cuffs; and Sir Marmaduke's factotum, Major Stone, otherwise Twenty Stone, a big, broad-chested, jovial, bushy-whiskered, moneyless free-lance,—completed the party.

CHAPTER III.

STARTING THE GAME.

"HALLOA!" suddenly shouted Sir Marmaduke from his vantage-ground on the rug.

Every body looked up.

"Halloa!" shouted the old gentleman again, plunging his hands over the wrists in his trousers-pockets, and bringing to the surface a couple of letters. "By Jove! I forgot to tell Mrs. Mason or any of them that more people were coming down! Here, Stone—somebody—just ring that bell, will you? Here are two men coming down to-day—be here by dinner, they say; and I forgot to order rooms and things for them!"

"Who are they, Sir Marmaduke?" asked Lyster languidly.

"What the deuce is that to you, sir?" roared the old gentleman. "Friends of mine, sir! That's enough, isn't it? Have you finished lunch."

"I haven't had any," said Lyster. "I never eat it. I hate lunch."

"Great mistake that," said Mr. Vincent, wiping his mouth. "Ought always to eat whenever you can. 'Gad, for such an omelette as that I'd get up in the middle of the night."

"Perhaps, Lyster," said Major Stone, coming back from ringing the bell, "you're of the opinion of the man who said that lunch was an insult to your breakfast and an injury to your dinner?"

"He was a confounded fool, whoever he was," broke in Sir Marmaduke. "I hate those fellows who talk epigrams. Halloa, Gumble, is that you? Tell Mrs. Mason

two gentlemen are coming down to stop. She must get rooms ready for them, and that sort of thing."

"Yes, Sir Marmaduke," said Gumble. "In the Barracks, Sir Marmaduke?"

"God bless my soul, sir! how should I know?" said his master testily. "What do I keep a housekeeper for, and a pack of lazy servants, who do nothing but eat, if I'm to be worried about things like this? Tell Mrs. Mason, sir! Do as you're told!"

And exit Gumble, whose admirable training and long experience only prevented him from bursting into a guffaw.

"Though you refused Captain Lyster, I don't think you'll mind telling me who these gentlemen are, Sir Marmaduke?" said Barbara, leaving the table, and advancing to the rug.

"No, my dear; I'll tell you any thing. Besides, they'll be here to-night. One is Mr. Beresford, and the other a learned professor. There, I've thrown them among you to worry their reputations before they arrive; and now I'll be off to my study. And don't any of you come and bother me; do you hear? If you want any thing, ask Stone for it. Come, Russell."

And, followed by the lawyer, the old gentleman left the room, after patting Barbara's head with one hand, and shaking his clenched fist, in a serio-comic manner, at the rest of the company.

"What very strange people my cousin does get hold of!" said Miss Lexden, commencing the onslaught directly the door was closed. "Which Mr. Beresford is it, do you suppose?"

The question was general, but Mr. Townshend answered it, by saying pompously,

"Perhaps it's Mr. Beresford, one of the Directors of the Bank of England, who—"

"God forbid!" broke in Lyster, suddenly.

"Amen to that sweet prayer," said Barbara, in a low voice. Then louder: "Oh, dear, let's hope it's not an old gentleman from the City."

"No, no; don't fear," said Major Stone, laughing. "You all know him. It's Charley Beresford, from the Tin-Tax Office."

"What! the Commissioner?" exclaimed little Miss Townshend, clapping her hands. "Oh, I *am* so glad! He is *such* fun!"

"Oh, every body knows Mr. Beresford," said Vincent; "capital judge of cooking; on the committee of the Beauclerk."

"I'm afraid I'm nobody, then," said old Miss Lenden; "what age is he?"

"Oh, same age as every body else," drawled Lyster. "I find every body's the same age,—seven-and-twenty. Nobody ever goes beyond that."

"You know Mr. Beresford, aunt," said Barbara. "He's a favourite horror of yours. You recollect him at Hawley last year?"

"Oh, the odious man who carried on so shamefully with that rich woman,—the grocer's widow!" said the old lady. "Well, wasn't it a grocer?—merchant, then, if you like,—something to do with the City and the West Indies, I know. Oh, a dreadful person!"

"Charley Beresford's not a bad fellow, though," said Lyster. "Who did Sir Marmaduke say the other man was? Professor something."

"Perhaps Major Stone knows him," chimed in Mrs. Townshend.

"Who's the Professor that's coming down, Stone?" asked Lyster.

"I don't know. I only know two professors: Jackman the conjuror,—Jacquinto he calls himself,—and Holloway the ointment-man; and it's neither of them. This is some scientific or literary great gun that Sir Marmaduke was introduced to lately."

"Oh, dear!" said Barbara, plaintively, "what a dreadful idea! Probably an old gentleman, with gold spectacles and a bald head, covered all over with the dust of the British Museum, and carrying dead beetles and things in his pockets!"

"A professor!" said Miss Townshend; "we had one at Gimp House—a French one! I'm sure he'll take snuff and have silk pocket-handkerchiefs."

"And choke at his meals," added Barbara. "This is too horrible."

"I trust he won't come from any low neighbourhood," said Mrs. Vincent; "the small-pox is very bad in some districts in London."

"The deuce! I hope he won't bring it down here," drawled Lyster.

"There's not the slightest fear of infection, if you've been vaccinated," said Mr. Townshend.

"Oh, but I haven't," replied Lyster. "I wouldn't be—at least without chloroform; it hurts one so."

"What nonsense, Captain Lyster!" laughed Barbara. "Why, I was vaccinated, and it didn't hurt me the least."

"Did it hurt as much as sitting for your photograph?" asked the Captain, rising. "Because I'll never sit for my photograph again, except under chloroform."

"Well, small-pox or not, you'll see the old gentleman at dinner," said Stone; "and you mustn't chaff him, mind, Lyster; for he's a favourite of Sir Marmaduke's."

And so the luncheon-party broke up. Old Miss Lexden and Miss Townshend drove out in a pony phaeton, with the intention of falling in with the shooting party; Mrs. Vincent retired to her room, to allow the process of digestion to take place during her afternoon nap; Mr. Vincent walked leisurely across the fields to the neighbouring village, and had an interview with a fisherman's wife, who had a new method of dressing mackerel; Mr. Townshend took out a pamphlet on the Bank Charter, and, having placed it before him, went straight off to sleep; Major Stone mounted his sure-footed cob and rode round the farm, looking after broken fences, and dropping hints as to the expediency of all being ready with the Michaelmas rent; and Barbara and Captain Lyster wandered into the Paddock, with the intention of playing croquet.

But they had played only very few strokes, when Lyster, leaning on his mallet, looked across at his companion, and said gravely,

"I assure you, Miss Lexden, I pity you from the bottom of my soul."

As she stood there, her complexion heightened by the exercise, the little round hat admirably suiting the classic shape of her head, and the neatest little foot tapping the mallet, she didn't look much to be pitied; and she tossed her head rather disdainfully, as she asked,

"Pity me, Captain Lyster! and why?"

"Because you are so horribly bored here! I've been such a terrible sufferer from *ennui* myself, that I know every expression on those who have it; and you're very far advanced indeed. I know what it is that beats you, and I can't help you."

"And what is it, pray?"

"You know what Cleopatra says in the *Dream of Fair Women*: 'I have no men to govern in this wood!' Pardon me; I'm a singular person; not clever, you know, but always saying what I think, and that sort of thing; and you're dying for a flirtation."

"Surely *you* have no cause to complain. I've never tried to make you my 'Hercules, my Roman Antony,' Captain Lyster."

"No; you've been good enough to spare me. You've known me too long, and think of me, rightly enough perhaps, as the 'dull, cold-blooded Cæsar;' and there's no one here that's at all available except Stone, and his berth with Sir Marmaduke is like a college-fellowship—he'd have to resign all income if he married. It's an awful position for you! Oh, by Jove, I forgot the two men coming! I'm afraid Charley Beresford's no go; but you might make great running with the Professor."

"*Que d'honneur!*" said Barbara, laughing at his serious face. "That is a compliment, especially after our notions of what he will be like;" and then, after a minute's reflection, she added, with a proud gesture, "It would be a

new field, at all events, and not a bad triumph, to win a steady sage from his books and—”

“Vivien over again, by Jove!” said Lyster, in the nearest approach he had ever made to a shout; “Vivien divested of all impropriety; only look out that Merlin does not get you into the charm. They’ve no end of talk, these clever fellows. I knew a professor at Addiscombe—deuced ugly bird too—who ran off with an earl’s daughter, all through his gab—I beg pardon, his tongue.”

“*Gare aux corbeaux!* I flatter myself I can hold my own with the old crows,” said Barbara; “however, this is mere nonsense. No more croquet, thank you, Captain Lyster. I must go in and reflect on your words of wisdom.”

And dropping him a little curtsy of mock humility, she moved off towards the house.

“I’d lay long odds she follows up the idea,” said Lyster to himself, as he sat down on the twisted roots of an old elm and lit a cheroot. “She’s a fine creature,” he added, looking after her; “something in the Cheetah line, —fine and swervy and supple, and as clever as—as old boots. How awfully old I’m growing! I should have gone mad after such a girl as that once; and now—she doesn’t cause me the slightest emotion. There’s that little Townshend, now,—ah, that’s quite another matter!”

Had Barbara really any notion of following out Lyster’s sportive notion, and of playing Vivien to an aged Merlin? of winning from his goddess Study a man whose whole life had been passed at her shrine, and of lighting with as much fire as yet remained to him eyes dimmed with midnight researches? I know not. But I do know that she spent more time that evening over her toilet than she had done during her stay at the Grange, and that she never looked lovelier than in her rich blue dinner-dress, trimmed with black lace, and with a piece of velvet passing through her hair, and coquettishly fastened at one side by a single splendid turquoise. Perhaps some thought of her conversation with Lyster flitted across her

brain; for she smiled saucily as she stepped down the wide old staircase, and she had hardly composed her countenance by the time she had passed into the drawing-room, where the party was assembled. The room was lighted only by the flickering blaze of a wood-fire (for the evenings were already chilly), and she could only indistinctly make out that the gentleman whom Sir Marmaduke introduced as "Professor Churchill," and who was to take her in to dinner, was tall, had no spectacles, and was apparently not so old as she had anticipated. But when she looked at him in the full light of the dining-room, she nearly uttered an exclamation of surprise when she saw, as the embodiment of her intended Merlin, a man of six feet in height, about thirty years of age, with short wavy brown hair, hazel eyes, a crisp dark beard, and a genial, good-humoured, sensible expression. All this she took in in covert glances; and so astonished was she, that after a few commonplaces she could not resist saying,

"And are you really a professor, Mr. Churchill?"

He laughed heartily—a clear, ringing, jolly laugh—as he replied, "Well, I am,—at least I stand so honoured on the books of old Leipzig University, and our good host here always will insist on dubbing me with my full title. But I don't generally sport it. I always think of dancing, or calisthenics, or deportment,—Turveydrop, you know,—in connexion with the professorship. I can't help noticing that you look astonished, Miss Lexden; I trust I haven't rudely put to flight any preconceived notions of yours as to my dignity?"

"No—at least—well, I will frankly own my notions were different."

"There, you see, I had the advantage; with the exception of flatly contradicting the late Mr. Campbell in his assertion about distance lending enchantment, &c., my ideas of you are thoroughly realised. But—I had seen you before."

"You had!" said Barbara, feeling a pleasurable glow pass over her cheek at something in his tone.

“Oh, yes; several times. The first time ten years ago, when I saw you in company with your father—”

“My father! Where?” interrupted Barbara.

“Where? oh, at an hotel,—Burdon’s Hotel. You won’t remember it, of course.” (Barbara never knew why Major Stone, who was sitting near them, grinned broadly when Mr. Churchill said this.) “You were a little child then. And recently I have seen you at the Opera, and ridden past you in the Row.”

At this juncture Sir Marmaduke called out to Churchill from the other end of the table, and the conversation became general. Barbara watched Mr. Churchill as he took a leading part in it, his earnest face lit up, and all listening attentively to his remarks. What a clever, sensible face it was! And he went to the Opera, and rode in the Park! What about Vivien and Merlin now?

CHAPTER IV.

THE COMMISSIONER'S VIEWS ARE MATRIMONIAL.

MR. CHARLES BERESFORD, Junior Commissioner of the Tin-Tax Office, who was expected down at Bissett, did not leave London, as he had intended, on the day which witnessed Mr. Churchill's arrival at that hospitable mansion. His portmanteau and gun-case had been taken by his servant to the Club, where he was to call for them on his way to the station; and he had arranged with one of his brother-commissioners to undertake his work of placing his initials in the corner of various documents submitted to him. He had stayed in town longer than his wont; and as he looked out into the dreary quadrangle of Rutland House, in a block of which the Tin-Tax Office was situate, and gazed upon the blazing flags, and the dull *commissionnaires* sitting on their bench outside the principal entrance and winking in the heat, and upon the open windows opposite,—whereat two clerks were concocting an effervescent drink in a tumbler, and stirring it round with a paper-knife,—he cursed the dullness, and expressed his delight that he was about to rusticate for a lengthened period.

Nobody heard this speech; or if, indeed, the words fell upon the ear of the soft-shod messenger who at that moment entered the room, he was far too dexterous and too old an official to let his face betray it. He glided softly to Mr. Beresford's elbow, as that gentleman still remained at the window, vacantly watching the powder-mixing clerks, and murmured,

“Letter, sir.”

“Put it down,” said Beresford, without turning round.
“Official, eh?”

"No, sir, private. Brought just now by a groom. No answer, sir."

"Give it here," said Beresford, stretching out his hand. "Ah, no answer! That'll do, Stubbs."

And Stubbs went his way to a glass-case, in which, in the company of four other messengers and twenty bells, his official days were passed, and gave himself up to bemoaning his stupidity in having taken his fortnight's leave of absence in the past wet July instead of the present sultry season.

Mr. Beresford looked at the address of the letter, and frowned slightly. It was a small note, pink paper, with a couchant dog and an utterly illegible monogram on the seal, and the superscription was written in a long scrawly hand. There was an odour of patchouli, too, about it which roused Beresford's ire, and he muttered as he opened it, "Confounded stuff! Who on earth is she copying now, with her scents and crests and humbug? I thought she'd more sense than that!" And he ran his eye over the note. It was very short.

"DEAR CHARLEY,—What has become of you? Why do you never come near The Den? It is nearly three weeks since you were here. I'm off to Scarborough on Tuesday; a lot of my pupils are there and want me, so I can carry on my little game of money-making, get some fresh air, and perhaps pick up some fresh nags to sell before the hunting season, all 'under vun hat,' as Tom Orme fasechous—facesh (I don't know how to spell it)—says. Come up and dine to-night at seven. There are two or three good fellows coming, and I want to talk to you and to look at your old phiz again, and see how much older you've grown during your absence, and how much *balder*; for, you know, you're growing *bald*, Charley, and that will be awful hard lines to such a *swell* as you. Seven sharp, mind.

"Always yours,

"K. M.

"P.S. Charley, if you don't come, I shall think

you've grown *proud*; and it'll be a great shame, and I shall never speak to you again.

“K. M.”

Now lest, after a perusal of this letter, any one should think ill of its writer, I take leave to announce at once that Kate Mellon was a virtuous woman; pure in heart, though any thing but simple; without fear, but not without as much reproach as could possibly be heaped upon her by all of her own sex who envied her good looks, her high spirits, and her success. There are, I take it, plenty of novels in which one can read the doings, either openly described or broadly hinted at, of the daughters of Shame under many a pretty alias; and it is because one of these aliases describes the calling of which Kate Mellon was the most successful follower, that I am so desirous of clearing her good name, and immediately vindicating her position with my readers. Kate Mellon was a horsebreaker, a *bonâ-fide* horsebreaker; one who curbed colts, and “took it out of” kickers and rearers, and taught wild Irish horses and four-year-olds fresh from Yorkshire spinneys to curvet and caper prettily in the Park. She taught riding, too; and half the Amazons in the Row owed their tightness of seat and lightness of hand to her judicious training. She hunted occasionally with the Queen's hounds and with the Pytchley, and no one rode straighter or with more *nonchalance* than she. Give her a lead, that was all she wanted; and when she got it, as she invariably did from the boldest horseman in the field, she would settle herself in her saddle, left hand well down, right hand jauntily on her hip, and fly over timber, water, no matter what, like a bird. In social life her great pride was that there “was no nonsense” about her; she was not more civil to the great ladies who sent their horses to her establishment to be broke, and who would occasionally come up and inspect the process, than she was to the stable-helpers' wives and children, who all worshipped her for her open-handed generosity. Tommy Orme, who was popularly supposed to be a hundred and fifty years old, but who

lived with the youth of the Household Brigade and the Foreign Office and the *coryphées*, and who knew every body remarkable in any one way, never was tired of telling how Kate, teaching the Dowager Lady Wylminster to drive a pair of spirited dun ponies, had, in the grand lady's idea, intrenched upon her prerogative, and was told that she was a presuming person, and desired to remember her place.

"Person, indeed!" said Kate; "person yourself, ma'am! My place isn't by you after that, and now get the duns home the best way you can;" with which she sprang from the low phaeton, struck off across the fields, and left the wretched representative of aristocracy "with a couple of plunging brutes that soon spilt the old woman into the hedge, broke the trap all to pieces, and rushed away home with the splinter-bar at their heels—give you my word!" as Tommy used to narrate it.

Her manner with men was perfectly frank and open, equally devoid of reticence or coquetry. She called them all by their Christian names if they were commoners, by their titles if they were lords. She answered at once when addressed as "Kitty," or "Old Lady," or "Stunner;" by all of which appellations she was known. She would lay her whip lightly across the shoulders of any particular friend as a token of recognition at the meet; would smoke a cigarette on her way home after the kill; and always carried sherry and sandwiches in a silver combination of flask and box. Her grammar was shaky, and her aspirate occasionally misplaced; she never read any thing but *Bell's Life* and books on farriery, and she laughed a loud, ringing, resonant shout; but her speech was always free from bad words, and no man ever tried a *double entendre* or a blasphemy twice in her presence. Living the odd strange life she did, defiant or all society's prejudices, it was yet strange that even London slander had left her unassailed. They did say that she was very much taken by Bob Mayo's sabre-scar when he returned from the Crimea, and that Barker, the steeple-chase rider, half gentleman, half jock, was en-

gaged to her; but nothing came of either of these two reports. Early in her London career, very soon after she came to town, and when men were first beginning to inquire who was the dashing horsewoman who rode such splendid cattle with such pluck and skill, De Blague, the Queen's messenger, assumed to know all about her, and at Limmer's, one night, threw out certain hints by no means uncomplimentary to himself, and eked out with many nods and winks; but two days after that, as De Blague, with two other Foreign-Office men, was leaning over the rails in the Row, Miss Mellon rode up, and denouncing him as a "bragging hound," slashed him with her by no means light riding-whip severely over the head and shoulders. After that day no one cared to say much against Kate Mellon.

Who was she, and where did she come from? that no one positively knew. When The Den at Ealing (she so christened it; it was called Myrtle Farm before) was to let, the neighbours thought the landlord would stand out of his rent for many years. The house was a little, long, one-storied building, cut up into small rooms; old, dilapidated, and damp. The stables were rotting with decay; the barns untiled and tumbling down; the twenty or thirty acres of land attached were swampy and unproductive. The place stood untenanted for half a year. Then, one morning, an old gentleman arrived in a four-wheeled cab, went all over the premises, had an interview with the proprietor, announced himself as Mr. Powker, of the firm of Powker and Beak, of Lincoln's Inn, and within a fortnight the lease was assigned to Miss Kate Mellon, spinster. The house was papered and painted, and put in order; the stables were entirely altered and renovated, and fitted with enamel mangers, and tessellated pavements, and bronze devices for holding the pillar-reins, and all the newest equine upholstery; some of the barns were converted into carriage-houses, and one of the largest into a tan-strewn riding-school; the land was thoroughly drained and laid out in paddocks, where there were tan-rides and all kinds of jumps,

and an artificial brook, and every thing for a horse's proper tuition. Miss Mellon did not receive visits from the neighbouring gentry, principally lawyers and merchants, who went regularly to business, and always stared hard at her when their wives were not with them; nor did she attend the parish-church; but she gave largely to all the parochial charities, and in the winter had a private soup-kitchen of her own. I believe that occasionally gin was dispensed in small glasses to the soup-recipients; but all was done under the superintendence of Freeman, the staid stud-groom, who had followed her from Yorkshire, where she said "her people" lived. But she never said any thing more about them; and you would as soon have got a comic song out of an oyster as a word from Freeman. And she prospered wonderfully. She had to make large additions to the stables, and to build rooms for an increased force of grooms; and even then there were always half a score of horses waiting on her list for admission, either for training or cure. She made money rapidly, and kept it: no better woman of business ever breathed; in a big ledger she scrawled her own accounts, and, as she boasted, could always tell to a farthing "how she stood." With all this she was generous and hospitable; paid her grooms good wages, and gave frequent dinner-parties to her friends,—dinner-parties which scandalised her solemnly pompous neighbours, who would look aghast at the flashing lamps of the carriages dashing up the little carriage-drive to fetch away the company at the small hours, or would listen from beneath their virtuous bedclothes to the shouts of mirth and snatches of melody which came booming over the hushed fields.

One of these dinner-parties—that to which she had invited Beresford—is just over. The French windows in the long, low dining-room are open; the table is covered with the remains of dessert, and some of the guests have already lighted cigars. Kate Mellon heads her table still; she never leaves the room to the gentlemen,—“It's slow,” she says; “women alone fight or bore;” so she remains.

You can catch a good glimpse of her now under that shaded swinging moderator-lamp; a little woman, with a closely-knit figure, long violet eyes, and red-gold hair, taken off over her ears, twisted in a thick lump at the back of her head, and secured with a pink coral comb of horse-shoe shape. She is dressed in white spotted muslin, fastened at the throat and waist with coral brooch and clasps. Her nose is a little too thick for beauty; her lips full; her mouth large, with strong white teeth; her hands are white, but large and sinewy; and the tones of her voice are sharp and clear. She is shouting with laughter at a song which a jolly-looking young man, sitting at the little cottage-piano at the end of the room, has just finished; and her laugh makes the old rafters ring again.

"I always yell at that song, Tom," she says. "I haven't heard it since last winter, the day that 'Punch' Croker dined here, and we gave him an olive to taste for the first time."

"He's tremendous fun, is Punch," said the singer. "Why didn't he dine here to-day? Is he out of town?"

"He's got a moor with Penkridge," said Beresford, who was sitting next the hostess. "By Jove, how bored Penkridge will be before he's done with him!"

"Punch has not got much to say for himself," said a tall man, in a dark beard. "I've had him down to dine with me when I've been on guard at the Bank, and, 'pon my soul, he's never said a word the whole night!"

"He was at Baden with us last year," said Beresford; "and when we used to sit and smoke our weeds after dinner in front of the Kursaal, he used to bore us so with staring at us and saying nothing, that we used to pay him to go away. Subscribe five francs, or thalers—according to our means, you know—and send him to play at the tables to get rid of him."

"He's not a bad fellow, though, Punch Croker," said Kate. "And what I like in him is, he never lets out that he don't know every thing!"

"No, that's just it!" said the tall guardsman. "Just

after the Derby, I was confoundedly seedy, and my doctor told me I wanted more ozone."

"What's that, Jack?" asked the man at the piano.

"Well, it's some air or stuff that you don't get by sitting up all night, and lying in bed till three. From the doctor's I went to the Rag, and found Meaburn there; and we'd just agreed to dine together, when Punch Croker came in. I told Meaburn to hold on, and we'd get a rise out of Punch. He asked us if we were going to dine, and we said yes, and that he might dine too, if he liked. And I told him I'd got some ozone, and asked him his opinion, as a sort of fellow who knew those things, how it should be cooked. He thought for one moment, and then said, perfectly quietly, 'Well, if you have it before the cheese, it should be broiled.' Never let on that he didn't know what it was: never changed a muscle of his face,—give you my word!"

They all laughed at this, and then the tall guardsman said, "It's a great bore, though, to get a reputation for stupidity. It's as bad as being supposed to be funny. People are always expecting you to say stupid things, and sometimes it's deuced hard to do."

"Poor old Charleville!" said Beresford; "we all sympathise with you, old fellow, though no one can imagine you ever found any difficulty in being stupid. Comes natural, don't it, old boy?"

Captain Charleville didn't seem to relish this remark, and was about to reply angrily, when Tom Burton, the man who had been singing, struck in hastily with, "Well, it's better to be or to seem stupid, than to be stupid and have the credit of being clever. Now there's Northaw, only said one decent thing in his life; and because that has been told about, fellows say that he's a deuced clever fellow, and that there's more in him than you'd think."

"What was the one good thing he did say?" asked Kate.

"Well, it was one day when he was out with the Queen's last season. Stradwicke was there, and Pattan, and Bellairs, and a lot of men; and Northaw was in a

horrid bad temper,—had got up too soon, or something, and was as rusty as Old Boots; so while he was fretting and fuming about, and blackguarding the weather, and his stirrup-leathers, and every thing else, Tom Winch rode up to him. You know Tom Winch, son of great contractor, timber-man, builds bridges, and that sort of thing. ‘Morning, my lord!’ says Tom Winch. ‘Morning,’ says Northaw, as sulky as a bear. ‘What do you think of my new horse, my lord?’ says Tom Winch. ‘Ugly brute,’ says Northaw, looking up; ‘ugly, wooden-legged brute; *looks as if he’d been made at home.*’

Burton rose during the laugh that followed his story, and rang the bell. “I must be off,” he said; “I’ve rung to have the phaeton round, Kitty. Charleville, you’ll come with me? I can find room for you, Beresford.”

“No; thanks,” said Beresford; “I rode down. Oh, tell them to bring my horse round too,” he added to the servant.

“Wait five minutes, Charley,” said Kate Mellon in an undertone; “let us have a quiet talk after they’re gone. I’ve got something to say to you.”

“Well, good night, Kate; good night, old lady. If you pick up any thing good in Yorkshire, let’s know, there’s a Stunner! I’ve promised to mount my sister next season, and she sha’n’t ride any thing you don’t warrant. Good night, Beresford; good night, old lady;” and with hearty hand-shakes to Kate, and nods to Beresford, Captain Charleville and Tom Burton took themselves off.

“Now, Charley,” said Kate, leaning forward on the table while Beresford lit a fresh cigar and threw himself back in his chair,—“now, Charley, tell us all about it.”

“About what?” asked Beresford, rolling the leaf of his cigar round with his finger. “That is good, by Jove! You say you want to talk to me, and you begin by asking me to tell you all about it!”

“I mean about yourself. You’re horribly low, and dull, and slow, and wretched. You’ve scarcely spoken

all the evening, and you ate no dinner, and you drank a great deal of wine."

"You're a pretty hostess, Kitty! You've checked off my dinner like the keeper of a *table-d'hôte*."

"Well, you know you might drink the cellar dry, if you liked. But you're all out of sorts, Charley; tell me all about it, I say!"

"You certainly are a strange specimen, Stunner," said Beresford, still calmly occupied with his cigar-leaf; "but there's a wonderful deal of good in you, and I don't mind telling you what I wouldn't say to any one else. I'm done up, Kitty; run the wrong side of the post; distanced, old lady. I've been hit frightfully hard all this year; my book for the Leger looks awful; I owe pots of money, and I am very nearly done."

"My poor Charley! said the girl, bending forward, with deep interest in her face. "That certainly is a blue look-out," she continued,—for however earnest was her purpose, she could not but express herself in her slang metaphor. "Is there nothing to fall back upon?"

"Nothing; no resource, save one—and that I'm going to look after at once—marriage!"

"Marriage!"

"Yes; if I could pick up a woman with money, I'd settle down into a regular quiet humdrum life. I'd cut the turf, and ride a bishop's cob, and give good dinners, and go to church, and be regularly respectable, by Jove! I should make a good husband, too; I think I should; only—the worst of it is, that these women with money, by some dispensation of nature, are generally so frightfully hideous."

"Yes," said the girl, who had pushed her hands through her hair, and then clenched them tightly in front of her, and who was looking at him with staring, earnest eyes. "I can't fancy you married, Charley; that's quite a new view of matters; and, as you say, the rich women are not generally pretty. You can't have every thing, Charley?"

"No," said Beresford, gloomily. "I know that;

and it would be deuced hard lines to have to take a Gorgon about with you, and to have to glare at a plain-headed woman sitting opposite you for the rest of your life. But need must—what am I to do?"

"Charley," said the girl, suddenly tilting her chair on to its front legs, and drumming with her right hand upon the table; "look here. You can't have every thing, you know, and it's better to make the running over open ground, no matter how heavy, than to dash at a thick hedge where there may be water and Lord knows what on the other side. Don't hurry it so, Charley; you'll get pounded without knowing it, and then there'll be nothing to pull you through. You can't expect every thing in a wife, you know, Charley. If you got money, you couldn't look for rank, you know, eh?"

"Why, how you do talk about it, old lady!" said Beresford, flicking the ash off his cigar. "No; I'm not exacting. I wouldn't care about her pedigree, so long as she was well weighted."

"That's right; of course not, Charley! I should think you'd find some one, Charley; not grand, you know, but good and honest, and all that. Not very beautiful either, perhaps, but not ugly, you know; and one who'd love you, Charley, and be true to you, and take care of you, and make you a good wife."

"Yes, I know, and all that sort of thing; but where is she to come from?"

"You might find such a one, Charley, where you never looked for it, perhaps; one who could bring you a little fortune, all honest money, and who could tell you of her past life, which you never dreamed of, and need not be ashamed of. There might be such a one, Charley!"

She had slid from her chair to the ground, and knelt, with her hands on his knees, looking eagerly into his face. Her eyes gleamed with excitement; she had pushed her hair back from her forehead, and her lips were parted in eager anticipation of his words. They came at length, very slowly. At first he turned pale,

and caught his breath for an instant ; then gently lifted her hands, and muttered between his teeth, "It's impossible, Kate ; it can't be !"

"Impossible !"

"It can't be, I tell you. What would—there, you don't understand these things, and I can't explain. It's impossible ! I was a fool to start the subject. Now I must go. Good-by, child ; write me a line from Scarborough ; they'll forward it from the office. Won't you say good-by ?"

He gripped her cold, passive hand, and two minutes afterwards she heard the sound of his departing horse's feet on the carriage-drive.

For a while Kate Mellon stood motionless, then stamped her foot violently, and sank into a chair, covering her face with her hands, through which the tears welled slowly. Rousing herself at length, she hurried to a writing-table, pulled out a gaudily-decorated *papier-mâché* blotting-book, and commenced scrawling a letter. She wrote hurriedly, passionately, until she had covered the sheet, running her gold pen-holder through the tangled mass of hair at the back of her head, and twisting a stick of sealing-wax with her teeth the while. The letter finished, she skimmed through it hastily, put it in an envelope, and directed it to "F. Churchill, Esq., *Statesman Office, E.C.*"

CHAPTER V.

“THERE’S NOTHING HALF SO SWEET IN LIFE.”

FOUR days had slipped away since Churchill’s first arrival at Bissett Grange, and he had begun to acknowledge to himself that they had passed more pleasantly than any previous time in his recollection. The mere fact of getting out of business was a great relief to him ; he revelled in the knowledge that he had nothing to do ; and, in odd times and seasons,—as he lay in bed of nights, for instance,—he would chuckle at the thought that the coming morrow had for him no work and no responsibilities in store ; and when he went up to dress himself for dinner, he would settle down into an easy-chair, or hang out of the open window, and delight in the prospect of a good dinner and delightful society, of music and conversation, from which no horrid clock-striking would tear him away, and send him forth to dreary rooms and brain-racking until the small hours of the morning. Society, music, and conversation ! It is true that he enjoyed them all ; and yet, when he came to analyse his happiness, he was fain to admit that they all meant Barbara Lexden. As in a glass darkly, that tall majestic figure moved through every thought, and sinuously wound itself round every impulse of his heart. At first he laughed at his own weakness, and tried to exorcise the spirit, to whose spells he found himself succumbing, by rough usage and hard exercise. There is probably nothing more serviceable in getting rid of a sharp attack of what is commonly known as “spooniness”—when it is accidental, be it remembered, not innate—than the eager pursuit of some healthy sport.

Men try wine and cards; both of which are instantaneous but fleeting remedies, and which leave them in a state of reaction, when they are doubly vulnerable; but shooting or hunting, properly pursued, are thoroughly engrossing while they last, and when they are over necessitate an immediate recourse to slumber from the fatigue which they have induced. In the morning, even should opportunity offer, the "spoony" stage is at its lowest ebb; it is rarely possible to work oneself up to the proper pitch of silliness immediately after breakfast, and then some further sporting expedition is started, which takes one out of harm's way. But in Churchill's case even this remedy failed; he was not much of a sportsman; not that he shot badly, but that he was perpetually *distract*, and when reminded of his delinquencies by a sharp, "Your bird, sir!" from one of his companions, would fire so quickly, and with so much effect, as to mollify the speaker, and lead him to believe that it was shortsightedness, and not being a "Cockney"—that worst of imputations amongst sportsmen—that led the stranger to miss marking the rise of the covey. And yet Churchill displayed no lack of keen vision in making out the exact whereabouts of a striped petticoat and a pair of high-heeled Balmoral boots which crossed a stile a little in advance of the servants bringing the luncheon; but these once seen, and their wearer once talked to, sport was over with him for the day, and he strolled back with Miss Lexden, at a convenient distance behind Miss Townshend and Captain Lyster, who led the way.

"You are soon tired of your sport, Mr. Churchill," said Barbara; "I should have thought that you would have followed ardently any pursuit on which you entered."

"You do me a great deal too much honour, Miss Lexden," replied Churchill, laughing; "my pursuits are of a very desultory nature, and in all of them I observe Talleyrand's caution,—*Point de zèle*."

"And you carry that out in every thing?"

"In most things. Mine is a very easy-going, un-

eventful, unexcitable life; I live thoroughly quietly; *da capo*—all over again; and it is seldom that any thing breaks in upon the routine of my humdrum existence."

"Then," said Barbara, looking saucily up at him from under her hat—"then you do not follow the advice which your favourite Talleyrand gave to the ambassadors whom he was despatching, *tenez bonne table, et soignez les femmes.*"

Churchill looked up, and for an instant caught her glance; then he laughed lightly, and said,

"Well, not exactly; though the dinners at the club, even the modest joint and the table-beer, are not by any means to be despised; and as for the rest of it, not being a diplomatist, Miss Lexden, I have no occasion to play the agreeable to any one save in my own house, and, being a bachelor, the only woman I have to see to as properly *soignée* is my old mother, and I *do* like her to have the best of every thing."

"Your mother lives with you?"

"Yes, and will, so far as I can see, until the end of the chapter."

"She—you must be very fond of her!" said Barbara, as by a sudden impulse, looking up at his kindling eyes and earnest face.

"I am very proud of her," he replied; "she is more like my sister than my mother; enters into all my hopes and fears, shares all my aspirations, and consoles me in all my doubts."

"More like your wife, then," said Barbara, with a slight sneer. "You have in her a rare combination of virtues."

"No," said Churchill; "not rare, I am disposed to think. I don't suppose that, in your class,—where maternity means nothing in particular to sons, and merely chaperonage, or the part of buffer, to ward off paternal anger for bills incurred, to daughters,—such characters flourish; but in mine they are common enough."—"A little touch of old Harding's Radicalism in that speech, by Jove!" thought he to himself.)

"I don't exactly follow your reference to my class as distinct from your own. I suppose we mix amongst pretty much the same people, though as individuals we have not met before. But," added Barbara, with a smile, "now that that great occurrence has taken place, I don't think we need enter into lengthy disquisitions as to the charms and duties of maternity; indeed, we will not, for I shall ask you to observe the only conditions which I require from my friends."

"And they are—?" asked Churchill.

"*Qu'on exécute mes ordres*, as Louis Napoleon said when asked what should be done on the Second of December. So long as my commands are obeyed, I am amiability itself."

"And suppose they were disobeyed?" asked Churchill again.

"Then—but I won't tell you what would happen! I don't think you'll ever have the chance of knowing; do you think you shall? Not that I like amiable people generally—do you? Your blue-eyed girls, with colourless hair like blotting-paper, and—but I forgot I was talking to an author. I suppose you're making fun of all I say?"

"On the contrary," said Churchill, struggling to keep his gravity, and producing a small memorandum-book, "I purpose making a note of that description for use on a future occasion. There is a spiteful simplicity in that phrase about 'blotting-paper hair' which is really worth embalming in a leader."

"Now I know you're laughing, and I hate to be laughed at—"

"By no means; I subscribe the roll. I am now one of the *âmes damnées*, sworn to obey the spell of the sorceress: and the spell is—?"

"Nothing. Never mind. You will know easily enough when it is once uttered. Now they're coming back to us, and I've lost my glove. Have you seen it? How very absurd!"

As she spoke, they came up with Lyster and Miss

Townshend, who were waiting for them at a gate leading into the Grange lands.

"How slowly you walk, Miss Lexden!" said Lyster; "Miss Townshend thought you never would come up with us."

Miss Townshend, with much curl-tossing and laughter, declared she had never said any thing of the kind.

"Quite otherwise," replied Barbara; "from the earnest manner in which you were carrying on the conversation, there could be no doubt that it was you who were going a-head."

"I?—I give you my word I was merely talking of scenery, and telling Miss Townshend how much I should like to show her Rome."

"And promising, when there, to enter into the spirit of the proverb, and do as the Romans—eh, Captain Lyster?"

"Oh, ah,—yes! I see what you mean. That's not so bad, eh, Mr. Churchill? You might use that in some of your thingummies, eh? Though I don't know that there's much difference between Rome and any other place, after all. It's rather like London, I think."

"Is it?" said Churchill. "I confess my short sojourn there gave me a very different idea."

"Well, I don't know; it's mouldier and more tumble-down, certainly, but there are some parts of it that are uncommonly like the unfinished streets in the new part of Belgravia. And people walk about, and eat and drink, and flirt, you know, just as they do in town. There's a Colosseum at Rome, too, as well as in London, only the one in Rome isn't in such good repair."

This was said in perfect good faith; and the others shouted with laughter at it, in the midst of which they came to a stile, joining upon the Paddock, and here they parted into couples again, only this time Churchill and Barbara took the lead.

"I think she's made another *coup*," said Lyster, looking at them, as they immediately fell into earnest conversation. "She certainly is wonderful,—never misses fire!"

"If I were Barbara, I should be careful about any flirtation with Mr. Churchill. They're dreadful people, these poets, you know,—at least so I've always heard; and if you give them any encouragement, and then won't marry them, they cry out, and abuse you terribly in books and newspapers."

"That would be awful!" said Lyster; "as bad as having your letters read out in a breach-of-promise case, by Jove! Never could understand how fellows wrote such spoony letters to women,—never could fancy how they thought of all the things they said."

And yet I think, if Captain Lyster had been rigorously cross-examined, he must needs have confessed that he himself had never, throughout the whole course of his previous life, gone through so much actual thinking as since he knew Miss Townshend. There was, perhaps, no species of flirtation in which he was not an adept, for he had sufficient brains to do what he called the "talkee-talkee;" while his natural idleness enabled him to carry on a silent *solitude à deux*, and to make great play with an occasional elevation of the eyebrow or touch of the hand. He had run through a thorough course of garrison hacks, and had seen all the best produce of the export Indian market; he had met the beauties of the season at London balls and in country houses, and his listlessness and languor had hitherto carried him through scot-free. But now he was certainly "fetched," as his friends would call it, and began to feel an interest in Miss Townshend which he had never felt for any other person. There had been a two days' flirtation between him and Barbara Lexden; but they were so utterly unsuited, that, at the end of that time, they, as it were, showed their hands to each other, and then, with a laugh, threw up their cards. The flirtation was never renewed; but a curious, strange friendship,—exhibited in the conversation about the coming professor,—and always half raillery on both sides, existed between them. But "this little Townshend girl," as he thought of her in his dreamy reveries, was quite another matter; she was so jolly and

good-tempered, and so approachable, and never gave herself any airs, and never wanted talking to or that sort of thing, but could amuse herself always, as chirpy as a bird, by Jove! And these attributes had an immense amount of weight with taciturn Fred Lyster, who, moreover, had recently discovered a bald spot about the size of a sixpence at the top of his back-parting, and who immediately perceived imminent age, determined on marriage, and even thought of making his will. And little Miss Townshend walks by his side, and prattles away, and laughs, saucily tossing her curls in the air, and is as merry as possible; save when, stealing an occasional glance from under her hat, she detects her companion's eyes very earnestly fixed upon her, and then a serious expression will settle on her face for an instant, and something like a sigh escape her.

We are a strange race! Here are two couples engaged in the same pursuit, and yet how different is the process! While Lyster is strolling idly by Miss Townshend's side, and listening to her little nonsense, Churchill and Barbara are stepping a-head, thoroughly engrossed in their conversation. He is talking now, telling her of a German adventure of his; how, with some other students, he made the descent of the Rhine on one of the timber-rafts; how they came to grief just below the Lörely, and were all nearly drowned. He tells this with great animation and with many gestures, acting out his story, as is his wont; and throughout all he has a sensation of pleasure as he catches glimpses of her upturned earnest face, lighting up at the special bits of the narrative, always eager and attentive. His earnestness seems infectious. She has dropped all her society drawl, all her society tricks and byplay, and shows more of the real woman than she has for many a day. They talk of Germany and its literature, of Goethe and Schiller and Heine; and he tells her some of those stories of Hoffmann which are such special favourites with *Bürschen*. Thus they pass on to our home poets; and here Barbara is the talker, Churchill listening and occasionally commenting. Bar-

bara has read much, and talks well. It is an utter mistake to suppose that women nowadays have what we have been accustomed, as a term of reproach, to call "missish" taste in books or art. Five minutes' survey of that room which Barbara called her own in her aunt's house in Gloucester Place would have served to dispel any such idea. On the walls were proofs of Leonardo's "Last Supper" and Landseer's "Shoeing the Horse;" a print of Delaroche's "Execution of Lady Jane Grey;" a large framed photograph of Gerome's "Death of Cæsar;" an old-fashioned pencil-sketch of Barbara's father, taken in the old days by D'Orsay long before he ever thought of turning that pencil to actual use; and a coloured photograph—a recent acquisition—of a girl sitting over a wood-fire in a dreamy attitude, burning her love-letters, called "L' Auto da Fé." On the bookshelves you would have found Milton, Thomas à-Kempis, *David Copperfield*, *The Christmas Carol*, a much-used Tennyson, Keats, George Herbert's Poems, Quarles' *Emblems*, *The Christian Year*, Carlyle's *French Revolution*, Dante, Schiller, *Faust*, Tupper (of course! "and it is merely envy that makes you laugh at him," she always said), *The Newcomes*, and a quarto Shakespeare. No French novels, I am glad to say; but a fat little Béranger, and a yellow-covered Alfred de Musset are on the mantel-piece, while a brass-cross-bearing red-edged Prayer-Book lies on the table by the bed. Barbara's books were not show-books; they all bore more or less the signs of use; but she had read them in a desultory manner, and had never thoroughly appreciated the pleasure to be derived from them. She had never lived in a reading set; for when old Miss Lexden had mastered the police intelligence and the fashionable news from the *Post*, her intellectual exercises were at an end for the day; and her friends were very much of the same calibre. So now for the first time Barbara heard literature talked of by one who had hitherto made it his worship, and who spoke of it with mingled love and reverence—spoke without lecturing, leading his companion into her fair share of the talk, mingling apt quotation with caustic comment

or enthusiastic eulogy, until they found themselves, to Barbara's surprise, at the hall-door.

I am glad that it is my province as historian to discourse to my readers of the thoughts, impulses, and motives influencing the characters in this story, else it would be difficult for me to convey so much of their inner life as I wish to be known, and which yet would not crop out in the course of the action. In writing a full-flavoured romance of the sensational order, it is not, perhaps, very difficult to imbue your readers with a proper notion of your characters' character. The gentleman who hires two masked assassins to waylay his brother at the foot of the bridge has evidently no undue veneration for the Sixth Commandment; while the marchioness who, after having only once seen the young artist in black velvet, gives him the gold key leading to her secret apartments, and makes an assignation with him at midnight, is palpably not the style of person whom you would prefer as governess for your daughters. But in a commonplace story of every-day life, touching upon such ordinary topics as walks and dinners and butchers' meat, marrying and giving in marriage, running into debt, and riding horses in Rotten Row,—where (at least, so far as my experience serves) you find no such marked outlines of character, you must bring to your aid all that quality of work which in the sister art is known by the title pre-Raphaelitic, and show virtue in the cut of a coat and vice in the adjustment of a cravat. Moreover, we pen-and-ink workers have, in such cases, an advantage over our brethren of the pencil, inasmuch as we can take our readers by the button-hole, and lead them out of the main current of the story, showing them our heroes and heroines in *déshabille*, and, through the medium of that window which Vulcan wished had been fixed in the human breast—and which really is there, for the novelist's inspection—making them acquainted with the inmost thoughts and feelings of the puppets moving before them.

When Barbara went to her room that night and surrendered herself to Parker and the hair-brushes, that pat-

tern of ladies'-maids thought that she had never seen her mistress so preoccupied since Karl von Knitzler, an *attaché* of the Austrian Embassy,—who ran for a whole season in the ruck of the Lexden's admirers, and at last thought he had strength for the first flight,—had received his *coup de grâce*. In her wonderment Parker gave two or three hardish tugs at the hair which she was manipulating, but received no reproof; for the inside of that little head was so busy as to render it almost insensible to the outside friction. Barbara was thinking of Mr. Churchill—as yet she had not even thought of him by his Christian name, scarcely perhaps knew it—and of the strange interest which he seemed to have aroused in her. The tones of his voice yet seemed ringing in her ears; she remembered his warm, earnest manner when speaking from himself, and the light way in which he fell into her tone of jesting badinage. Then, with something like a jar, she recollected his suppressed sneer at the difference in their “class,” and her foot tapped angrily on the floor as the recollection rose in her mind. Mingled strangely with these were reminiscences of his comely head, white, shapely hands, strong figure, and well-made boots; of the way in which he sat and walked; of—and then, with a start which nearly hurled one of the brushes out of Parker's hand, she gathered herself together as she felt the whole truth rush upon her, and knew that she was thinking too much of the man, and determined that she would so think no more. Who was he, living away in some obscure region in London, among a set of people whom no one knew, leading a life which would not be tolerated by any of *her* friends, to engross her thoughts? Between them rolled a gulf, wide and impassable, on the brink of which they might indeed stand for a few minutes interchanging casual nothings in the course of life's journey, but which rendered closer contact impossible. And yet—but Barbara determined there should be no “and yet;” and with this determination full upon her, she dismissed Parker and fell asleep.

And Churchill—what of him? Alas, regardless of

his doom, that little victim played ! When old Marmaduke gave the signal for retiring, Churchill would not, on this night, follow the other men into the smoking-room. The politics, the ribaldry, the scandal, the horsey-doggy talk, would be all more intolerable than ever; he wanted to be alone, to go through that process, so familiar to him on all difficult occasions, of “thinking it out;” so he told Gumble to take a bottle of claret to his room, and, arrived there, he lit his old meerschaum, and leant out of the window gazing over the distant moonlit park. But this time the “thinking it out” failed dismally; amid the white smoke-wreaths curling before him rose a tall, slight graceful figure; in his ear yet lingered the sound of a clear low voice; his hand yet retained the thrill which ran through him as she touched it in wishing him “good night.” He thought of *her* as he had never thought of woman before, and he gloried in the thought: he was no love-sick boy, to waste in fond despair, and sicken in his longing; he was a strong, healthy man, with a faultless digestion, an earnest will, a clear conscience, and a heart thinking no guile. There was the difference in the rank, certainly—and in connexion with this reflection a grim smile crossed his face as he remembered Harding, and his caution about “swells”—but what of that? Did not good education, and a life that would bear scrutiny, lift a man to any rank? and would not she—and then he drew from his pocket a dainty, pearl-gray glove (Jouvin’s two-buttoned, letter B), and pressed it to his lips. It *was* silly, ladies and gentlemen, I admit; but then, you know, it never happened to any of *us*; and though “the court, the camp, the grove” suffer, we have the pleasure of thinking that the senate, the bar, the commerce of England, and the public press, always escape scot-free.

Breakfast at Bissett Grange lasted from nine—at the striking of which hour old Sir Marmaduke entered the room, and immediately rang the bell for a huge

smoking bowl of oatmeal porridge, his invariable matutinal meal—until twelve; by which time the laziest of the guests had generally progressed from Yorkshire-pie, through bacon, eggs, and Finnan haddies, down to toast and marmalade, and were sufficiently refected. Barbara was always one of the last; she was specially late on the morning after the talk just described; and on her arrival in the breakfast-room found only Mr. and Mrs. Vincent, who always lingered fondly over their meals, and who, so long as the cloth remained on the table, sat pecking and nibbling, like a couple of old sparrows, at the dishes within reach of them; Captain Lyster, who between his sips of coffee was dipping into *Bell's Life*; and Sir Marmaduke himself, who had returned from a brisk walk round the grounds and the stables and the farm, and was deep in the columns of the *Times*. But, to her astonishment, the place at table next hers had evidently not yet been occupied. The solid white breakfast-set was unused, the knives and forks were unsoiled; and yet Mr. Churchill, who had hitherto occupied that place, had usually finished his meal and departed before Barbara arrived. This morning, however, was clearly an exception; he had not yet breakfasted, for by his plate lay three unopened letters addressed to him. Barbara noticed this—noticed moreover that the top letter, in a long shiny pink envelope, was addressed in a scrawly, unmistakably female hand, and had been redirected in a larger, bolder writing. As she seated herself, with her eyes, it must be confessed, on this dainty missive, the door opened, and Churchill entered. After a general salutation, he was beginning a half-laughing apology for his lateness as he sat down, when his eye lit on the pink envelope. He changed colour slightly; then, before commencing his breakfast, took up his letters and placed them in the breast-pocket of his shooting-coat.

“This is horrible, Miss Lexden,” he said, “bringing these dreadful hours into the country; here—where you should enjoy the breezy call of incense-breathing morn, the cock’s shrill clarion, and all the rest of it—to come

down to your breakfast just when the bucolic mind is pondering on the immediate advent of its dinner."

"Be good enough to include yourself in this sweeping censure, Mr. Churchill," said Barbara. "I was down before you; but I accepted my position, nor, however late I might have been, should I have attempted—"

"I congratulate you, sir," interrupted Mr. Vincent, dallying with a lump of marmalade on a wedge of toast,—"I congratulate you, Mr. Churchill, on a prudence which but few men of your age possess."

"You are very good, but I scarcely follow you."

"I saw you—I saw you put away your letters until after breakfast. A great stroke that! Men generally are so eager to get at their letters, that they plunge into them at once, before meals, little thinking that the contents may have horrible influence on their digestion."

"I am sorry to say that I was influenced by no such sanitary precautions. My correspondence will keep; and I have yet to learn that to read letters in the presence of ladies is—"

"Pray, make no apologies, as far as I am concerned," said Barbara, with a curl of her lip and an expansion of nostril; "if you have any wish to read your doubtless important correspondence—"

"I have no such wish, Miss Lexden. *Litera scripta manet*; which, being interpreted, means, my letters will keep. And now, Mr. Vincent, I'll trouble you for a skilful help of that game-pie."

Churchill remained firm; he was still at breakfast, and his letters remained unopened in his pocket, when Barbara left the room to prepare for a drive with Miss Townshend. As they reëntered the avenue after a two hours' turn round the Downs, they met Captain Lyster in a dog-cart.

"I have been over to Brighton," he explained; "drove Churchill to the station. He got some news this morning, and is obliged to run up to town for a day or two. But he's coming back, Miss Lexden."

"Is he, indeed!" said Barbara. "What splendid in-

telligence! I should think, Captain Lyster, that, since the announcement of the fall of Sebastopol, England has scarcely heard such glorious news as that Mr. Churchill is coming back to Bissett." And, with a clear, ringing laugh, she pulled the ponies short up at the hall-door, jumped from the carriage, and passed to her room.

"She don't like his going, all the same,—give you my word," said Lyster, simply, to Miss Townshend.

And she did not. She coupled his sudden departure with the receipt of that pink envelope and the address in the feminine scrawl. Who was the writer of that letter? What could the business be to take him away so hastily? With her head leaning on her hand, she sits before her dressing-table pondering these things. It certainly *was* a woman's writing. Is this quiet, sedate, self-possessed man a flirt? Does he carry on a correspondence with— And if he does, what is it to her? She is nothing to him—and yet—who *can* it be? It was a woman's hand! She wonders where he is at that moment; she would like to see him just for an instant.

If she could have had her wish, she would have seen him by himself in a railway-carriage, an unheeded *Times* lying across his knee, and in his hand a little pearl-gray kid-glove.

CHAPTER VI.

THE COMMISSIONER'S SHELL EXPLODES.

WHEN the party assembled for dinner on the day of Mr. Churchill's hurried departure from the Grange, they found they had an addition in the person of Mr. Commissioner Beresford, who arrived late in the afternoon, and did not make his appearance until dinner-time. A man of middle height and dapper figure, always faultlessly dressed; slightly bald, but with his light-coloured hair well arranged over his large forehead; with deep-sunk, small, stony-gray eyes, a nose with the nostrils scarcely sufficiently covered, and a large mouth, with long white teeth. He had small white—dead-white—hands, with filbert nails, and very small feet. There was in the normal and ordinary expression of his face something sour and mordant, which, so far as his eyes were concerned, occasionally faded out in conversation, giving place to a quaint, comic look; but the mouth never changed; it was always fox-like, cruel, and bad. There was no better-known man in London; high and low, rich and poor, gentle and simple, all had heard of Charley Beresford. Citizen of the world, where was he out of place? When there was a tight wedge on the staircase of Protocol House on the Saturday nights when Lady Helmsman received; when at a foot-pace the fashionable world endured hours of martyrdom in procession to the shrine which, once reached, was passed in an instant, according as sole trophy the reminiscence of a bow,—Mr. Beresford was to be seen leaning over the stoutest of dowagers, and looking fresh and undrooping even when pressed upon by the pursiest of diplomatists. When the noble souls

of the Body Guards were dismayed within the huge carcasses which contained them because it was whispered that the 180th Hussars intended to wear white hats on their drag to the Derby, and to deck their persons and their horses with blue rosettes—both which insignia had hitherto been distinctive of the Body Guards—it was Charley Beresford who was applied to on the emergency; and who, on the Derby morning, turned the tables completely by bringing the Body Guards from Limmer's straw-thatched and amber-rosetted to a man. The 180th and their blue were nowhere; and "Go it, yaller!" and "Brayvo, Dunstable!" were the cries all down the road. When Mr. Peter Plethoric, the humorous comedian of the Nonpareil Theatre, wanted some special patronage for his benefit, "Charley, dear boy!" was his connecting link with that aristocracy whose suffrages he sought. He went into every phase of society: he had an aunt the widow of a cabinet minister, who lived in Eaton Square; and an uncle a bishop, who lived in Seamore Place; and he dined with them regularly two or three times in the season, lighting his cigar within a few yards of the house, and quietly strolling down to the Argyll Rooms, or to the green-room of the theatre, or to the parlour of a sporting-public to get the latest odds on a forthcoming fight. He turned up his coat-collar of late when he visited these last-named places, and the pugilistic landlords had orders never to pronounce his name, but to call him "Guv'nor;" it would not do for an official high in her Majesty's service to be recognised in such quarters. Before his aristocratic friends obtained for him his commissionership, his name was one of the most common current amongst the Fancy; but since then he had eschewed actual presence at the ring, as he had blue bird's-eye handkerchiefs, cigars in the daylight, and nodding acquaintance with broughams in the park. "*Il faut se ranger*," he used to say; "it would never do for those young fellows down at the Office to think that I was or ever had been a fast lot; and those confounded Radical papers, they made row enough about the appoint-

ment, and they'll always be on the look-out to catch me tripping." He little knew that his fame had preceded him to the Tin-Tax Office; that all the old clerks were prepared to receive him with something between fear and disgust, all the young ones with unmingled admiration; that daily bulletins of his dress and manners were circulated amongst the juniors, and that those who could afford it dressed at him to a man.

He was four-and-thirty when he got his appointment, and he had held it about two years. There was even betting that the promotion would "go in the office;" that Mr. Simnel, the secretary, a very clever man, would get it; that the vacancy would not be filled up; and various other rumours. But the Chancellor of the Exchequer felt that Mr. Simnel had been going a little too much ahead lately, acting on his own responsibility; and as the widow of the cabinet minister (who owned a borough in Devonshire) and the bishop concurrently attacked the Premier, that nobleman gave way, and Charles Beresford exchanged the dreariness of Bruges, in which dull Belgian city of refuge he had been for some months located, for a seat in the board-room at Rutland House. His uncle and aunt, through their respective solicitors, bought up his outstanding debts, and settled them at a comparatively low rate (his Oxford ticks had been settled years ago out of his mother's income); and he came into a thousand a year, paid quarterly, free and unencumbered. A thousand a year, in four cheques on the Bank of England in January, April, July, and October, ought to be a sufficiency for an unmarried man; but with Charles Beresford, as with a good many of us, the mere fact of the possession of money gave rise to a wild desire for rushing into unlimited expense. To belong to three clubs—the Beauclerk in Pall Mall, aristocratic and exclusive; the Minerva (proposed thereat by the bishop), literary and solemn; the Haresfoot, late and theatrical;—to have capital rooms in South Audley Street; to keep a mail phaeton and pair, with a saddle-horse and a hunter during the season; to give and join in Greenwich and

Richmond dinners; to be generous in the matter of kid-gloves and jewelry; to have a taste (and to gratify it) in choice wines; to make a yearly excursion to Baden, and when there to worship extensively at the shrine of M. Benazet; to be a connoisseur in art, and a buyer of proofs before letters, and statuary, and tapestry, and antiques; to be miserable without the possession of an Opera-stall; all these vagaries, though pleasant, are undeniably expensive; and at the end of his second year of office Charles Beresford found that he had spent every farthing of his income, and owed, in addition, between three and four thousand pounds.

He could not compound with his creditors; he dared not go through the Court, for "those rascally papers" would then have been down on him at once, and his official appointment might have been sacrificed. The Government just then had two or three black sheep, about whom people had talked, among their subordinates; and Beresford might have been the Jonah, sacrificed to allay the storm of virtuous public indignation. Besides, though his great soul might have been won over to include in his schedule Messrs. Sams and Mitchell, Mr. Stecknadel, the tailor of Conduit Street, and Hocks, with whom his horses stood at livery, he could not inscribe the names of the Irrevocable Insurance Company, to whom for the money borrowed he had given the names of two substantial friends as sureties; or of Mr. Parkinson, solicitor, of Thavies Inn, who "did his paper," but required another signature on the back. So Mr. Charles Beresford was forced to confess himself "done up," "cornered," and "tree'd;" and only saw one way out of his difficulties—a good marriage. There was no reason why his final chance should not succeed, for he was a very pleasant, agreeable fellow when he chose; had a capital tenor voice, and sang French and German songs with sparkling effect and irreproachable accent; acted well in charade; talked all sorts of styles,—could be earnest, profound, sentimental, flippant, literary, or ribald, as occasion presented; waltzed with a gliding, long, swinging

step, which was the envy of all the men who saw him; was sufficiently good-looking, and had something like a position to offer.

Behold him, then, seated at Sir Marmaduke's table next to Miss Townshend, and with Barbara Lexden immediately opposite to him. He has been rattling on pleasantly enough during dinner, but has never forgotten the object of his life; he is aware that Barbara for him is not an available *parti*, with position certainly, but without money, and with extravagant notions; but he has some recollection of having heard that Mr. Townshend was something approaching to a *millionnaire*, and he determined to satisfy himself upon the point without delay.

"Not at all," he says, referring to something that has gone before; "not at all. It's all very well for you, Sir Marmaduke, whose lines have been cast in pleasant places, to talk so; but for us poor fellows who have to work for our living, this rest is something delightful."

"Work for your living!" growls out the old gentleman. "A pack of lazy placemen. Egad! the fellow talks as though stone-breaking were his occupation, and he'd just straightened his back for five minutes. Work for your living! Do you call sticking your initial to the corner of a lot of figures that you've never read, work? Do you call scrawling your signature at the bottom of some nonsensical document, to prove that you're the 'obedient, humble servant,' of some idiot whom you've never seen, work? Do you call reading the—"

"Now stop, Sir Marmaduke," said Beresford, laughing; "I bar you there. You mustn't repeat that *rococo* old rubbish about reading the newspaper and poking the fire as the sole work in a Government office. That *is* slander."

"I am bound to say," said Mr. Townshend pompously, "that when, in my capacity either as one of the directors of the East-India Company, or Prime Warden of the Bottle Blowers' Company, I have ever had occasion to transact business with any of the Government establishments, I have always found myself well treated."

"I am delighted to hear such testimony from *you*, sir," said Beresford, with some apparent deference, and inwardly thinking that the two positions named looked healthy as regards money.

"God bless my soul!" bawled Sir Marmaduke. "Here's a man drives up in a big carriage, with a powdered-headed jackass to let down the steps, and then he 'testifies' that he gets a messenger to take in his name and that he isn't insulted by the clerks. I wish with all my heart, Townshend, that you were a poor man with a patent to bring out, or a grievance to complain of, or an inquiry to make, and you'd devilish soon see the reception you'd get."

"I hear," said Mr. Vincent, with a mind to turn the conversation, "that a new system of refreshment-supply has recently been introduced into some of our public departments. I have a nephew in the Draft-and-Docket Office, whom I called upon about one o'clock the other day, and I found him engagad upon some very excellent *cotelettes à la Soubise*, which he told me were prepared in the establishment. That appears to me a most admirable arrangement."

"Very admirable," growled Sir Marmaduke, "for the public, who are paying the young ruffians for eating their Frenchified rubbish. By heavens! a clerk at ninety pounds a year, and a made-dish for lunch!"

"Quite right, Mr. Townshend," said Stone; "they feed stunningly now, and don't drink badly either. By the way, Beresford, I'm agent for Goupil's house at Bordeaux, and I could put in a capital cheap claret into your place, just the thing for your fellows in the hot weather. The tenders are out now, and a word from you would serve me."

"But, surely," said Barbara, laughing, "if, as Sir Marmaduke says, you don't work now, Mr. Beresford, you'll be less inclined than ever after M. Goupil's claret."

"Sir Marmaduke is an infidel, Miss Lexden," said Charley. "Send in your tender, Stone, and Goupil's Medoc shall be a fresh incentive to the virtuous Civil Servants!"

"Let him rave, my dear!" said Sir Marmaduke; "let him rave, as your idol Mr. Tennyson says. What he calls work, I call make-believe humbug. What I call work, is what my godson—what's his name—Churchill (what the deuce has he gone away for?) does, night after night, grinding his headpiece—that sort of thing."

"What Churchill is that, sir?" asked Charley.

"Mr. Churchill is a literary man, I believe," said Miss Townshend; "wonderfully clever—writes, you know, and all that."

"Oh, Frank Churchill! I know him," replied Beresford. "Has he been down here?"

"Yes; he only left this morning."

"He seems a very good sort of fellow," said Lyster generously, for he didn't quite like the tone of Beresford's voice, and did not at all like the manner in which the Commissioner was paying quiet attention to Miss Townshend. "He's made himself a general favourite in a very short time."

"Yes, that he has," said Miss Townshend; "he's very clever, and not at all conceited, and—oh! he's so nice."

Barbara said nothing.

"I had a few words with him about the money-article yesterday," said Mr. Townshend; "but I must say his views were scarcely so defined as I could have wished."

Beresford had listened attentively to these remarks. He thought he perceived a certain *tendresse* in Miss Townshend's manner of speaking of Churchill, which did not at all accord with his present views. So he said,

"No, Mr. Townshend; that's not Churchill's peculiar line. He's a poor man, though, as you say, Miss Townshend, a clever one. And he has some object in working hard, for he's going to be married."

"To be married?" exclaimed Miss Townshend, looking across at Barbara.

"To be married?" exclaimed Barbara, flushing scarlet. The next instant she turned deadly cold, and could have bitten her tongue out for having spoken.

"Well, well!" said old Miss Lexden, who up to this

time had been engaged in a confidential culinary chat with Mrs. Vincent; "that's always the way. Poor thing! I pity the young woman. These sort of persons always stay out all night, and ill-treat their wives, and all that kind of thing."

"Dear, dear!" said Mrs. Vincent; "leg-of-mutton *ménage* and batter-pudding, perhaps; no soup or fish. Dear, dear! what unwholesome things these love-marriages are!"

"But nobody said that it is a love match," said Miss Townshend. "Perhaps the lady is an heiress, whom Mr. Churchill has captivated by his talent."

"Yes," growled Sir Marmaduke, with a sardonic grin; "an heiress who has been struck with his articles on the Reformatory question, or has become completely dazzled by the lucidity of his views on the Maynooth Grant. A leader-writer in a daily newspaper is just the romantic youth that heiresses fall in love with."

"Now do be quiet, Sir Marmaduke, with your horrid sarcasm, and let us hear what the lady is like. Do tell us, Mr. Beresford," said Miss Townshend.

"Oh, I have no idea of her personal appearance," replied Beresford. "Every body says she's very nice, and that the marriage is coming off at once—that's all I know."

"Your curiosity will soon be gratified, with a very little trouble," interrupted Lyster. "You can ask Mr. Churchill himself—he's coming back to-morrow."

"Coming back!" exclaimed Beresford.

"Yes, to-morrow," replied Lyster, and added, between his teeth, "your little plot will soon be spoilt, my boy."

Shortly afterwards, when the ladies left the table, Barbara did not accompany the rest, but went straight to her own room. There she seated herself at the open window, which looked out upon the lawn and upon the high downs beyond, over which the yellow-faced moon was rising in solemn beauty. And Barbara nestled into the great easy-chair, which she had pulled forward, and rested her chin on her hand, and looked upon the grand

picture of varied light and shade with eyes that saw nothing of the beauty, and with a heart that comprehended it not. Down in the hollow lay a little farm, gray and cold and stony, as are such buildings in Sussex, and containing at that time a sleeping, snoring family; for the farmer, a thrifty man, had to be up betimes, and candle-light might as well be spared, and hard-working folk must rest. He did not think much about the moon, this Sussex farmer, nor did his hinds, two of whom were then snoring in the red-tiled barn just on the shoulder of yon hill; but the glorious lamp of night was as much in their thoughts as she was in those of Barbara Lexden, who had copied out "The moon is up, by Heaven! a lovely eve," from *Childe Harold*, and knew Alfred de Musset's wild lines on the same subject by heart, and had gone in for the romantic business about it, and done some very effective bits of flirtation, in which the goddess Luna was made good use of. But the moon was nothing now to Barbara, whose mind was full of a far more worldly object, and whose foot was tapping impatiently on the floor. Going to be married? Then it was all accounted for—that letter with the feminine *griffe*, which he had pocketed immediately and read apart, and his hurried departure for town. Going to be married! What business had he, then, to come down there, and talk and act as though no engagement fettered him—to talk, indeed, as though no notion of matrimony had ever crossed his mind? Could he—? No; that was impossible. He could not have been playing with her—making a fool of her? What was that he had said about difference of class in marriage? Ay, that settled the question; the *fiancée* was probably some dowdy woman, who could make a pie, and mend his clothes, and keep their maid-of-all-work in order. Well, the man was nothing to her—but she hoped he might be happy. It was getting very dull at Bissett, and she should suggest their departure to her aunt. They had invitations for several nice houses; and General Mainwaring's was not far off, and Boyce Combe was there, and Harvey Grenville; so that she should be sure

of plenty of fun. She had not seen Boyce Combe since the last Woolwich ball, and then he had been so horribly absurd, and had talked such ridiculous nonsense. He was so amusing, Major Combe; and—and then Major Combe's handsome, vacuous, simpering countenance, which for a moment had risen in Barbara's mind, faded again, and in its place there came a genial, clever, sensible face, with merry eyes and laughing mouth, and Major Combe's "ridiculous nonsense" seemed wretched balderdash as contrasted with Frank Churchill's pleasant talk.

A knock at the door, following which promptly little Miss Townshend glides into the room. A nice little girl, as I have remarked; a charming little being, bright and winning, but not the sort of person for a companion when one is in that state so well described as "out of sorts." Who, I wonder, is pleasant company for us in a real or fancied trouble? Certainly not the enthusiastic gusher who flings his or herself upon our necks, and insists upon sharing our sorrow,—which is a thorough impossibility. Certainly not the pseudo-moralist who tells us that all is for the best, and quotes Scripture, and suggests that, though we have had to retire from Palace Gardens and live in Bedford Row, there are many outcasts then sleeping on the steps of Whitechapel Church; and that, though our darling's life may be trembling in the balance, there are fever-courts and pestilence-alleys, in no house of which "there is not one dead." Certainly not the lively friend who thinks that "rallying" is the best course for binding the broken heart and setting at rest the perturbed spirit, and who accordingly indulges in one perpetual effervescence of mild sarcasm and feeble teasing. Miss Townshend belonged to this latter class; and entered the room with a little skip and a long slide, which brought her to Barbara's side.

"Oh, ho! and so we're annoyed, are we, and won't come among our friends? We sit and sulk by ourselves, do we?"

"I cannot possibly imagine what you mean, Alice,"

said Barbara coldly. "Take care, please; you're standing on my dress."

"Oh, of course not, poor darling, she can't imagine! But, without any joking, Barbara, it *is* too bad."

"What is too bad, Alice?" asked Barbara, without moving a muscle. She had a tremendous power over her face, and, when she chose, looked as impassible as the Sphinx, "staring straight on with calm eternal eyes."

"Now, don't be silly, Barbara dear," exclaimed Miss Townshend, who was getting rather annoyed because her friend had not gone off into hysterics. "You know well enough what I mean; and it is a shame, a horrible shame! Who would have thought that that learned clever man could have been such an incorrigible flirt? There now," putting up her hands, "you know perfectly well who I mean. And he did carry on with you in the most shameful manner—and going to be married all the time! Not that I'm sure you're not rightly served, Barbara. It's just the sort of thing you've been doing all your life, you know; but, still, one doesn't expect it in a man, does one, dear? I wonder—"

"*I* wonder when you'll have common sense, Alice. It's time, if what you told me this morning be true."

"O Barbara darling! O Barbara! don't remind me of it. Oh, how miserable you've made me! And you—you don't care one pin, when you know I'm so wretched.' And putting her handkerchief to her eyes, little Miss Townshend hurried out of the room.

And what of the girl who "didn't care one pin"? who had just been rallied upon having been made a fool of by a man—a man, moreover, for whom every hour of her life proved to her that she cared? Pride, love, vexation, doubt,—all these had influence on that throbbing heart; and she flung herself on her bed in a flood of tears.

CHAPTER VII.

TOUCHING A PROPOSAL.

WHEN Captain Lyster rose on the following morning, he had made up his mind to the commission of a very serious deed. A long course of reflection as he lay awake in the watches of the night, and the discovery, real or imaginary, of a further diminution of hair on the crown of his head, had determined him upon asking Miss Townshend to become his wife without any further delay. There was something in her fresh, cheery, pleasant manner that specially appealed to this *blasé* cynic; she was so unlike the women he had been accustomed to mix with in society, who were generally weak imitations of Barbara Lexden, or opinionless misses, who held "yea" and "nay" to be the sole ingredients necessary in their conversation; in fact, this chattering girl, who said every thing uppermost in her mind, who had capital spirits perënnially flowing, and who was natural without being either arrogant or "miss-ish," had completely enslaved him. He might have pottered on in silent admiration for some time longer, but that he had been greatly annoyed by Beresford's manner to Miss Townshend on the preceding evening; there was something in the Commissioner's easy familiarity, both during dinner and afterwards, which signally raised Lyster's wrath. He had towards Beresford that singular feeling, that compound of distrust, detestation, contempt, and fear, which we experience instinctively for any rival; and his love for this girl was far too serious a matter to permit any tampering with his plans. A good fellow, Fred Lyster; a kind-hearted, straightforward, honour-

able man, with very little guile; lazy, to a certain extent selfish, and considerably spoilt; but with an innate sense of right carrying him through many difficulties, and with a stout heart and a clear brain to support him under any trials.

He loved this girl, and he wanted to know whether his love was returned. To get at this information he saw but one way—a proposal. I have before said that he knew every trick and turn of flirtation; but this was something of far deeper import than a flirtation; means which he had previously used to ascertain “how he stood” with the temporary object of his affections, and which had elicited the satisfactory glance, hand-pressure, or word, he would have now deemed degrading both to himself and to her. His regard for her had been growing throughout the past season, and was rapidly culminating. He had watched her attentively, and studied all her movements, with a satisfactory result. He felt that she was a little fast, certainly; but that fastness he was convinced resulted from the mere overflow of animal spirits, and not from any desire to please in men’s eyes by affectation of men’s ways. That she was an heiress he didn’t care one bit about—he had plenty for both; and if she came to him, any thing that she had should be settled on herself. But how to ask her? Ah, how long did that pair of hair-brushes remain suspended over his head, while he gazed vacantly into the dressing-glass before him as this question rose in his mind! How often did he fling himself on the ottoman, nursing his foot and biting his lip in a perplexity of doubt! He could not go down on his knees, and offer his hand and heart, as they did on the stage; he could not write to her, either formally or spasmodically—he had a wholesome horror of committing himself on paper; he could not arrive at the knowledge he required through any third person; in fact (here the hair-brushes went to work again), there was no way but to take advantage of an opportunity, and propose. He must know his position, too, at once. He could not bear to see that fellow

Beresford hanging about her as he had been the previous night. He'd do it that very day. His whole frame, which had been pleasantly cooled by his shower-bath, tingled again at the mere thought; and a faint empty feeling, something like that which he experienced when insulted in the Engineers' mess-room at Salem by Poker Cassidy, came over him. Would he get as well out of this as out of that encounter? Then he held his own; and Cassidy, neatly drilled by a pistol-bullet through his ankle, limps with a crutch to this day. But this was a very different matter.

It was a dull breakfast that morning. Barbara sent down intelligence of a headache, and remained in her room; Miss Townshend had red rims to her pretty eyes, had no smile for any one, looked miserable, and sat silent; her papa had donned his very stiffest check cravat, and was, if possible, more pompous than usual; Sir Marmaduke had had his porridge early, had gone out, and not returned; old Miss Lexden always breakfasted in bed; and Mr. and Mrs. Vincent were utterly upset by a burnt omelette, about which they conveyed dismay to each other by eye-brow telegraph across the table. Only Major Stone was himself; and he bustled about, and made tea, and passed dishes, and joked and rallied in a way that ought to have been of service, but which signally failed. When Mr. Beresford entered the room, which was not until nearly all the others had finished their meal, he seemed for a few moments staggered by the gravity of the assemblage; but gliding into a vacant seat by Miss Townshend's side, he soon recovered his spirits, and commenced a conversation in his accustomed bantering tone. His neighbour seemed to brighten at once, and responded in her usual cheery manner, greatly to the disgust of poor Fred Lyster, sitting opposite, who, over his cold partridge, was still hard at work on the same problem which had occupied him when over his hair-brushes, and who knew as little how to attain his end as ever. He was glad when he heard Beresford say that business would require him to

ride into Brighton before luncheon, and that he must afterwards go round to the stables and see whether his hack was all right after her journey down. His joy toned down a little when Miss Townshend asked if said hack had ever carried a lady, but rose again when Beresford declared that he should be sorry to see any female friend of his on Gulnare's back.

"It isn't that she's vicious," he explained; "there's not an ounce of vice in her. But there are so many things she can't bear—dirty children, and puddles, and stone heaps in the road; and when she sees any of these she stands bolt upright for two minutes on her hind-legs, and then starts off with her head between her fore-legs, and nearly pulls your arms out of their sockets."

So Miss Townshend declared with much laughter, and with many shoulder-shrugs and exclamations of fright, that she could never think of mounting "any thing so dreadful;" and Lyster, to his immense delight, saw Beresford leave the room, light a big cigar on the steps, and clear off in the direction of the stables. Stone had already departed on his various errands; Mrs. Vincent had fetched a cookery-book from the library, and with her husband had retired to study it in the embrasure of the window; and Miss Townshend, left the last at table, was playing with a fragment of toast. Lyster knew her habits—knew that she was in the habit of skimming the *Post* to learn the whereabouts of her friends; and accordingly retreated quietly to the library.

Such a pleasant room, this! Not a bit of the wall to be seen for the dark oak book-shelves, which, crammed with books, extended from floor to ceiling on every side. A capital collection of books, in sober calf bindings (Sir Marmaduke once said that brilliant bindings and glazed book-cases always reminded him of a man with his hair parted down the middle, and could not understand what Barbara meant by asking him if Mrs. Nickleby had been a Wentworth): theology, politics, books of reference, poetry, drama, and history, all regularly ranged and properly catalogued. Fiction had a very moderate com-

partment allotted to it ; but the round table in the middle of the room, and the ottoman at the far end, were liberally strewn with volumes bearing the omnipresent yellow ticket of Mudie. Immediately in front of the big bow-window, which was shaded by a sun-blind, and through which you gazed over a lovely expanse of down, stood a huge writing-table, on which was an inkstand that might have held half a pint, a large blotting-pad, an oxydised-silver owl with ruby eyes erect on a paper-weight, and a bundle of quill pens, half split up, and all very much bitten at the tops ; for Sir Marmaduke, who was the principle occupant of the cane writing-chair, was apt to get very energetic in his correspondence. Here, too, the old gentleman indulged in the one literary occupation of his life—certain translations of Horace, which he altered and polished year after year, intending some time or other to show them to an old college friend, and then have a gorgeous edition printed on toned paper for private circulation. Here, in a huge iron safe, were kept big ledgers, and account-books of rents, rates, and expenditure on the estate, which gave three days' solemn investigation every quarter to Sir Marmaduke and Major Stone ; whereat there was much head-rubbing, many appealing looks to the ceiling, and much secret checking of fingers under the table, and reference to a ready-reckoner on the part of both gentlemen. And here in a secret draw of the writing-table, lay a little packet, which the old man would take out occasionally, would open, and sit gazing for half an hour together at the contents. They were not much,—a faded blue ribbon, once worn, with a little locket attached to it, round the throat of his old love at the Bath Assemblies, where he first met her ; a curl of hair, cut from her head after death : and an ivory miniature, by Stump, of a dark girl, with big brown eyes, and her hair banded tight to her forehead, and gathered into a large bow at the top of the head. After an inspection of this drawer the old gentleman would walk to the looking-glass, and glaring at his own reflection therein, would shake his head in a very solemn manner ;

he would be very mild and quiet, and, as Gumble noticed, would drink an extra bottle of claret during the evening.

When Lyster entered the room, he was annoyed to see that it was occupied. Old Mr. Russell, the lawyer, was at the writing-table; and Mr. Townshend was seated in an easy-chair close by, listening to the narration of some thick parchment deed which the lawyer was going through. Their business was apparently at an end, though; for Mr. Townshend said, "Then it's satisfactory, Mr. Russell?" to which the old gentleman, with nothing but his finger-tips visible below his cuffs, replied, "I think we may assume so;" and both gentlemen rose and left the room. Being in a highly nervous state, Lyster did not like these proceedings a bit. He wondered what that portentous-looking parchment was about—whether it had any reference to old Townshend's testamentary disposition; whether it had any thing to do with Miss Townshend. He thought he rather hated that old Russell, though he had not much idea why. His time was coming on now; he wondered how much longer before Miss Townshend would fetch the *Post*. Here it was, on the round table, with the other papers. He took one up and looked at it; but the type all ran together before his eyes, so he laid it down again, and walked up to the mantelshelf, and glared at the big black clock in the middle, and pulled the spear through the perforated fist of the bronze Diana on the top, and pushed it backwards and forwards; and then walking to the writing-table, lit a Vesta-match and blew it out. He plunged his hands into his pockets, and looked down at his boots, apparently intently scrutinising their make, in reality not seeing them in the least; then he took up a hare's-foot-handled paper-knife and tapped his teeth with it, threw it down, and commenced a Polar-bear-like promenade of the room.

The clock ticked solemnly on, and Captain Lyster was still pacing up and down, when the door opened and Miss Townshend entered. She seemed surprised to see any one in the room, and declared that she would not

remain a minute, and that she would take the greatest care not to disturb the Captain, who, she said with a smile, was evidently, from his perturbed expression, engaged upon the composition of an epic poem or other intense literary effort. At this remark the Captain grinned feebly, and besought the young lady not to mind his eccentricities, as he was full of them, though he was bound to confess he had never been mad enough to contemplate writing a poem. And then Miss Townshend smiled again, and seated herself at the round table, and taking up the *Post* turned to the "Fashionable intelligence," and was at once engrossed in the study of who was where, and at what country seats "select circles" were being "hospitably entertained." Lyster went to the writing-table, and began ornamenting the blotting pad with many spirited sketches, wondering all the time whether he should get any better chance for his contemplated announcement, or whether he should plunge into it at once. At last he thought he had an opportunity. Miss Townshend suddenly exclaimed, "Oh, Captain Lyster, here's news for you! You recollect Mary Considine? Yes, I should think you did. Those private theatricals at the Fenton's, where you and she—oh, I haven't forgotten it. Well, there's something about her here; listen: 'We understand that a matrimonial alliance will shortly take place between the Honourable Mary Considine, youngest daughter of Lord Torraghmore, and Major Burt, of the Life Guards.' That's Harry Burt, the straw-coloured one, isn't it? Poor Captain Lyster! doomed to wear the willow."

The chance, the chance at last!

"Surely, Miss Townshend," he commenced, "you cannot imagine that I ever seriously entertained any regard for Miss Considine. A very pleasant young lady, full of spirits, and highly amusing, but not possessing the qualities which one would look for in a wife. And you—can you imagine that in a house where *you* were—where I was in the habit of seeing *you*—. Done, by Jove!"

The last sentence, uttered under his breath, was evoked by the opening of the door, and the entrance of

Mr. Townshend, who looked more like the Ace of Clubs than ever when he saw the couple in apparently close conversation. He at once approached his daughter, and asked her if she had "written that letter?" She said, with some tremulousness, "No." Mr. Townshend then raised his voice, and said he must beg—and with him "beg" sounded marvellously like "insist"—that she would do it at once. So the young lady, albeit with tears in her eyes, went dutifully off to obey her father's behests; the old gentleman sat down to the *Times*, while Lyster glared at him from behind a book, and wondered whether one could possibly call a man to account for interrupting one's conversation with his daughter.

CHAPTER VIII.

TOUCHING ANOTHER PROPOSAL.

MR. BERESFORD meanwhile had strolled round to the stables, ascertained that, with the exception of the loss of a little hair from her off-hock, Gulnare seemed none the worse for her journey (horses never travel by rail without a something), ordered his groom to bring her round in half an hour's time, and made a cursory inspection of the other horses while finishing his cigar. At the time appointed he mounted and rode away into Brighton, starting at first over the Downs in a brisk canter, but gradually subsiding into a checked walk, which ill suited Gulnare's fiery disposition, and made her rider break the current of his thoughts by several behests of "Steady now!" "Quiet, old lady;" and such like. Indeed, Mr. Beresford had quite enough subject-matter for reflection. He, too, had been turning over in his mind the expediency of proposing to Miss Townshend, and had almost determined upon its being the right thing to do. The objection which he had urged in his discussion with Kate Mellon, that money and ugliness generally went together, would not hold good here. Miss Townshend was pretty and presentable; she was not clever, certainly; but so long as she was able to talk about Shakespeare and the musical glasses, that was all which the world would require of her in the way of conversation, and that sort of jargon would be easily picked up. She knew passably sufficient of the accomplishments of society, and was, as times went, in a very good set. Her people belonged to the plutocracy; but Beresford liked that rather than otherwise, recollecting how far pleasanter than the sham state and starveling magnificence of some of his aristo-

cratic friends were the town-houses and country places of City magnates and merchant princes, where every thing, from the sleek porter in the hall to the new and massive salt-spoons on the table, spoke of wealth. To ascertain whether his venture was a safe one was the object of Beresford's visit to Brighton. He had known so many mushroom magnates, who, after a couple of seasons of full-blown pride, had collapsed and tumbled into the mud from which they sprung, that he took no man's monetary position on hearsay. He had met Mr. Townshend at capital houses, and had seen his name in many apparently excellent City ventures; but, then, had he not met at the Duke of Banffshire's Mr. Poyntz, the great railway contractor, who two months afterwards smashed for a million and a half? and did not half the peerage welcome as a friend and respect as a banker the great Mr. Shoddy, who was at that moment engaged in oakum-picking in expiation of his fraudulent practices? There must be no mistake on this head; it would be a pretty thing if he, Charles Beresford, were not merely to find himself after a year or two with a penniless wife upon his hands, but were also to have the world talking about his *mésalliance*. As to the idea of rejection, that had scarcely entered his head. He was generally liked by women, and thought Miss Townshend no exception to the rule. Her father perhaps might look for money, and then he should have to square him as best he could. But Beresford argued to himself: these *nouveaux riches* generally look for position; and if they cannot get rank for their girls, they like a good official connexion. Did not Petter marry the daughter of old Dunkel, the West-India merchant (by the by, she was a little woolly, though), simply through his being Secretary to the Lakes and Fisheries Department? And a Commissioner at the Tin-Tax ranked higher than that. Walbrook delighted to talk of "my son-in-law's connexion with the Government;" and Dowgate Hill rejoiced in seeing a fourth-rate Cabinet Minister or occasional Secretaries of Foreign Legations, much beribboned, at his daughter's drums. As to whether he

cared for the girl, it scarcely entered into his mind to inquire; they would get on well enough; he would let her have her own way, so long as she did not interfere with him; he should keep up his hunting, but cut play of every kind; and if he got at all bored, why then he would go into Parliament. Fortunately, he thought, he was not like most men: he could get married without its interfering with any body; there was no "establishment" to break up; no inhabitant of a Brompton villa to tear her hair and use strong language until a liberal settlement was made; no jealous girls to upbraid and— As the thought of Kate Mellon and the recollection of his last interview with her flashed into Beresford's mind, he started involuntarily, and touched the mare with his spur. Gulnare jumped into the air, and started off like an arrow. By the time he pulled her up, he was at the top of St. James's Street, Brighton; and as he leisurely rode down the hill, he revolved in his mind the means of arriving at an immediate knowledge of his intended father-in-law's stability.

He was not long in arriving at his determination. Of all the men he knew, Simnel, the secretary at the Tin-Tax Office, was the most knowing; and he and Beresford were on the most intimate terms. Had Beresford been in town, he would have consulted Simnel personally about this marriage business; as it was, he thought that the secretary was the likeliest man to get for him the information he required. This information must be had at once; as, once satisfied, he would not give another evening's chance to Lyster or that man Churchill, in whose wheel he had put so neat a spoke, but would commence immediately to clear the course on which he hoped to win. So he turned into the Old Steine, and leisurely dismounting at the door of the telegraph-office, resigned Gulnare into the hands of a passing boy, to whom he was so intent on giving instructions as to walking her gently up and down, that he did not observe "that man Churchill" pass him in an open fly, the driver of which must have been stimulated by the pro-

spect of a large reward, as his horse was proceeding at a pace very rarely undertaken by Brighton fly-cattle. But perfectly ignorant of the propinquity of the gentleman with whose family history he had recently manifested so intimate an acquaintance, Mr. Beresford entered the telegraph-office, and taking up one of the printed slips, wrote the following message :

“ *C. B., Brighton, to Robert Simmel, Tin-Tax Office,
Rutland House, London.*

“ *Non olet pecunia.* Whether a round game with Townshend of Queensbury Gardens would repay the necessary illumination. Reply ; figures, if possible.”

The clerk counted the words and grinned. When Beresford, after saying that he would call for the answer, paid and walked out, the clerk carried the paper into the inner room where the manipulator was busy with his ever-clicking needles, and read the message out to him, grinning again ; whereupon they both expressed opinion that it was a “ rum start,” and another of those “ games” which supplied the interesting youths employed by the Electric Telegraph Company with so many topics of conversation.

Mr. Beresford put up his horse at a livery-stable, and then walked down towards the sea to while away the time until the answer should arrive. He knew Brighton thoroughly. He was a regular visitor from Saturday till Tuesday during November and December, when he stayed at the Bedford, and generally dined at the cavalry mess ; but he had never seen the place in its autumnal aspect. Those who only know Brighton in the winter would scarcely recognise her in September, when she has more the aspect of Ramsgate or Margate. In place of the dashing carriages, flies at half-a-crown an hour crawl up and down the King’s Road, the horses, perfectly accustomed to the dreary job, ambling along at their own sleepy pace ; the riding-masters are still to the fore, but for pupils, instead of the brilliant *écuyères*, they have heavy, clumsy girls in hired habits and hideous hats. All the officers of the cavalry regiment who can

get leave, take it; and those who cannot, devote themselves to tobacco in the solitude of their barrack-rooms. The Esplanade is thronged with fat people from the metropolitan suburbs, gorgeous Hebrews with their families from the Minorities, and lawyers' clerks with a week's holiday. The beach is covered with children stone-digging and feet-wetting; with girls who have just bathed, with their hair down their backs, and girls who are waiting for machines; with men selling shell-toys, and women imploring purchase of crochet-dolls; with hilarious men throwing sticks for their dogs to swim after; with contemplative men reading books, and gazing off them vacantly across the sea; with drowsy men, supine, with their hats shading their faces from the sun. The whole place is changed; the rich hotel and shopkeepers have gone inland (Tunbridge Wells is a favourite place of theirs) for relaxation, and their substitutes, goaded into madness by the unchanging blue sky and burning brick pavement, are bearish and morose; men wear plaid shooting-coats of vivid patterns in the afternoon, and women, in flapping hats with dragged feathers, promenade in the Pavilion; Brill's swimming-bath shuts up for painting and decoration; and there are people seen walking on the Chain Pier.

In this abnormal state of affairs Mr. Beresford found himself any thing but happy. He went to Mutton's and had some soup, and to Folthorp's and read the papers; he strolled down the King's Road, and inspected the evolutions of various young ladies who were disporting in the waves, and indulging the passers-by with the gambols of Bloomsbury-super-Mare. Then he put his legs up on a bench on the Esplanade, and smoked a cigar, and stared at the passers-by; and then, after the lapse of a couple of hours, he walked back to the telegraph-office, where he found a reply waiting for him. It was from Mr. Simmel, and merely said:

"Olet. Three stars in Leadenhall Street and Director of L. B. and S. C. meaning ten thou. Plated heavily. If with good hand, play game."

CHAPTER IX.

“A LITTLE PROUD, BUT FULL OF PITY.”*

ALTHOUGH only twenty-four hours absent from Bissett, Frank Churchill during that short period had undergone more mental conflict than is often suffered by many men in a course of years. He had had full time for reflection, and had availed himself of it to the utmost. While within the charmed circle he was necessarily under fascination; but now, although the witch was any thing but exorcised, he felt sufficiently himself to collect his thoughts, and he saw the absolute necessity of coming to some fixed determination as to his future conduct before he returned. Often before had he had occasion to weigh matters almost as important as this, though of course of a different character; and he was not the man to blink one jot of the attendant difficulties, or to overpersuade himself as to the feasibility of his designs simply because he wished them carried out. He was in love with this girl, then; he supposed that must be granted? at all events, by analysis and comparison, that was easily ascertained. Though, as the world goes, his life had been tolerably pure, he had in his student-days, and in the time immediately subsequent, had his *amour-elles* and flirtations like the rest; but when he remembered what had been his feelings for Gretchen, the fat and fair daughter of Anton Schütz, the beery saddler; for Ernestine, the sentimental heiress of the Graf von Triebenfeld; for Eugénie and Olympe, vestals of the Quartier Latin; or for any of the half-hundred young ladies with whom during the earlier portion of his Lon-

* Ben Jonson.

don career he had gone through the usual bouquet-sending, cotillon-dancing, Botanical-Fête-meeting flirtation,—he recognised at once that this was a very different matter. Breakers ahead and all round! As for Barbara, he felt conscious of no vanity in avowing to himself his perception of having excited her interest, but whether sufficiently to induce her to listen to an offer he could not imagine. Possibly, probably, she looked to making a brilliant marriage: her beauty and accomplishments were her capital, and should be turned to good purpose; and yet, as this idea passed through his mind, he had an instinctive feeling that Barbara's proud spirit would revolt from any such match, however much it might be pressed on her by her relations. Her relations! ay, even granting the girl's acquiescence, *there* would be one of the grand sources of difficulty: old Miss Lexden, rich, selfish, and narrow-minded, would doubtless oppose such a marriage in every possible way; and how would Sir Marmaduke look upon him, having come an invited and a welcome guest, and then brought this discord into the family? And even suppose it arranged somehow, she consenting and her friends satisfied, what was to be done with his mother, with whom and in whose house he then resided? how and where was the rest of her life to be passed? He could not live far from the office, where, thrice a week always, and occasionally more frequently, he was engaged till past midnight; and how would the brilliant beauty of the West be able to exist in the dreary fastnesses of Great Adullam Street, or the arid desert of Tiglath-Pileser Square? And then the narrow income—competence for one, a bare sufficiency for two! His horse must be given up, but that he would not so much mind; his Club (the Retrenchment) must be kept on, for business purposes, though he should of course never spend any money there; and he must take to sixteen-shilling trousers, and that sort of thing; all easy enough. But for her?—no brougham (and fancy those tiny high-heeled *bottines* over the villanous Mesopotamian pavement!), only an occasional Opera-box obtained from the

Statesman (situation high, surroundings queer, *claqueurs* and *amis des artistes*), two or three balls in the season, and perhaps one dinner-party at home, with the inevitable side-dishes and attendant carpet-beater. Ay, and worse beyond!—children born and reared in that dingy atmosphere, further expenditure to be met, perhaps sickness to be struggled through, and all the household gods dependent on him,—on the soundness of his health and the clearness of his brain, which failing, what had they to look to? *Aïe de me!* that last thought settled the question. Let it fade out, pleasant dream that it was; or rather let him crush it for ever! It was impossible, and so let it pass. Down go the Spanish castles, away melt the aerial estates; Duty's foot kicks away Alnaschar's basket, and there is the hard, dry, unsympathetic, work-a-day world before him! He will go back to Bissett, but only for a day, just to get his traps together and to make some plausible excuse, and then will start off. This first week of his holiday has been any thing but rest, and rest he requires. He will go to Scarborough—no! not there, for reasons; but to some watering-place, and pitch pebbles into the sea and lie fallow until he is compelled to return to work. Yes, that is the right course—he determines on it finally as the train nears the Brighton station; hopes must be crushed, and Duty must be obeyed. Duty has won the day for once—and where is the pearl-gray glove now? At his lips, of course! Frank Churchill has resolved upon doing his duty, and, like the drunkard in the old story, is "treating resolution."

Anxiety to test his newly-formed determination must be strong, for he ordered the flyman to drive as hard as he could to Bissett; but, cooling a little, dismissed the man at the lodge-gates, and strolled through the avenue towards the house. The leaves yet held their own; scarcely the slightest autumnal tint had fallen on them; and the grand old avenue looked magnificent. The weather was splendid; the sun shone brightly, while the air was clear and bracing; deer bounded in

the brushwood; and as Churchill stood rejoicing in the lovely view, a cart laden with game, and driven by little Joe Lubbock, the head-keeper's boy, emerged from the Home Copse, and made a pleasant feature in the landscape. All around told of wealth and peace and English comfort; and as Churchill surveyed the scene, he felt (as he had often felt) how great were the enjoyments of those born to such heritage, and (as he had never felt) how well-disposed he should be for the sake of those enjoyments to undertake the necessary responsibilities. His Radicalism was of the very mildest nature; the free and independent electors of Brighton or of Southwark would have scorned the feebleness of his ideas as to the requirements of the people; he had no wish to alter the laws of primogeniture, nor to see the furniture designed by Gillow or Holland emblazoned with the "swart mechanic's bloody thumbs;"—indeed, it must be confessed that he thought the "swart mechanic," when out of his place and wrong-headed through false leading, a very objectionable person. But he was in love, and wanted money and position to enable him to forward his suit; and as the thought of some who had both and did good with neither flitted across him, he stamped impatiently on the gravel, and the fair view and all the sweet excellence of nature faded out before his eyes.

He walked hurriedly on for a few paces, and then bethought him that somewhere close in the neighbourhood was the gate leading to the fir-plantation in which he had recently walked with Barbara on their return from the shooting-party. He had the whole afternoon to do nothing in, and it would be pleasant to renew the remembrance of that happy jesting talk. Memory, he thought rather bitterly, was a luxury which it did not require either rank or riches to enjoy. He struck across the dry crisp turf, and arrived at the gate; it opened on a short gravelled walk, with low palings on either side, terminating in a rustic stile, on the other side of which lay the fir-plantation. As Churchill entered the path he saw a figure seated on the stile at the other end, and in

an instant knew it to be Barbara Lexden. Her head was bent, and she was leaning forward, idly tracing figures on the turf with the point of her parasol. Churchill advanced with a strange fluttering of his usually regular-beating heart; but she did not appear to hear his footstep until he was close behind her, when she suddenly turned round, and their eyes met. It was a trying time for both, but Barbara was the first to speak.

"So soon back, Mr. Churchill? We—that is, Sir Marmaduke was led to believe that you would not return until the end of the week."

"Fortunately, Miss Lexden, my business in town was soon finished" ("Question of settlement with the lawyer, or naming the day with the lady," thought Barbara), "and I got back as quickly as I could. How lovely this place looks! Perhaps it seems doubly beautiful after twenty-four hours in London; but it appears to me even fresher, calmer, and more peaceful than when I left it."

"That, I suspect, is your poetic imagination, Mr. Churchill. You were praising Dryden the other night, and can now quote him to your own purposes. You know he says:

‘Winds murmured through the leaves his short delay,
And fountains o’er their pebbles chid his stay;
But, with his presence cheered, they cease to mourn,
And walks seem fresher green at his return.’”

"Aptly quoted, though the lines were addressed to a lady, and for ‘his’ read ‘your.’ I don’t think that even the fountains in Trafalgar Square would be weak enough to ‘chide my stay.’ But, apropos of poetic imagination, I am afraid I disturbed you from some deep reverie."

"You never were more mistaken," said Barbara, with a short laugh. "I—I came out on a much more unromantic expedition. I lost a glove a day or two ago, and—and fancied I might have dropped it somewhere here."

"Is this it?" asked Churchill suddenly, taking from his pocket a morocco-leather case, and producing from it the much-prized pearl-gray.

"Yes," said Barbara, glancing quickly at him from under her drooping eyelids; "that is it. How very fortunate!"

"I picked it up," said Churchill, "as we returned from the shooting-party the other day, and intended restoring it sooner, but forgot it. I am glad to be able to do so now." He handed her the glove, looked her straight in the face, and walked on silently by her side.

"We have had a new arrival here since you left," said Barbara, after a pause, swinging the glove slowly to and fro; "a Mr. Beresford. You know him?"

"Beresford? Oh, of the Tin-Tax Office! I have met him."

"You are on intimate terms?"

"I—I have not that honour. Mr. Beresford moves in a different set to mine."

"That question of 'sets' seems to be one of paramount importance with you, Mr. Churchill. How frequently you harp upon it!"

"It is a question which we must necessarily bear in mind, Miss Lexden," said Churchill, with emphasis; then smiling, added,—"*Suum cuique*, which is Latin, and unintelligible; 'the cobbler and his last,' which is English and vernacular. But why did you ask?"

"Simply because he seems amusing, and likely to be popular here. I am sorry we shall not have the opportunity of profiting by his high spirits, as aunt and I will probably be leaving on Thursday."

One quick glance told her that this shot, if intended for mischief, had signally failed. With perfect calmness Churchill replied,

"And I also must manage to survive the loss of Mr. Beresford's conversation, as I go to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" exclaimed Barbara; then, in her ordinary tone, "Ah, to be sure, you have of course so much to do."

"Well, said Churchill, smiling, "for a month I hope to do little beyond mooning on the beach and throwing pebbles into the sea."

"Yes," said Barbara quickly; "that is, I believe, the usual thing under the circumstances. And the place? the Isle of Wight, or Devonshire, of course?"

"Under the circumstances!" he echoed. "I beg your pardon, Miss Lexden, but I fear we are at cross purposes. Under what circumstances?"

("He braves it out to the last," thought Barbara; "who would have thought that he could have stooped to a shuffle, or degrade the woman he was engaged to, by tacitly ignoring the fact?") Then she said, curling her lip, and tossing the glove with a lightly contemptuous gesture,

"Good news travels fast, Mr. Churchill. The fact of your forthcoming marriage is known at Bissett."

"*My* forthcoming marriage? It's a joke, Miss Lexden?"

"We have heard it as a fact."

"And *you* believed it?" said Churchill, turning white, while his lip trembled visibly as he spoke.

"Why should I not?" After a pause, and in a low voice, "Then you are not going to be married?"

"Married, no! Miss Lexden, you must now listen patiently to what I should otherwise have kept secret, knowing the folly I have been guilty of. If ever I marry, Barbara Lexden will be my wife!"

She started, and seemed about to speak.

"One moment more," said he. "You know how completely I understand the difference in our position?" (An impatient gesture from Barbara.) "My sensitiveness, pride—call it what you will—would have kept me silent. Now I have spoken, and—Barbara—you must not keep me in suspense. Could it ever be possible?"

Perfectly colourless, she leant against the stile, but said nothing.

"Miss Lexden, you *must* end this doubt."

Silently she placed the little glove in his hand.

"Barbara! *my* Barbara!" and she was folded to his heart.

CHAPTER X.

AT THE TIN-TAX OFFICE, No. 120.

THE Tin-Tax Office, as I have before had occasion to remark, is situated in a wing of Rutland House; that noble building so well known to most Englishmen, whence are issued those concise documents relating to unpaid arrears of public imposts, and where the mulcting of the nation is carried on. The Tin-Tax is by no means a bad office, as times go; though it is rather looked down upon by the men in the Check and Counter-Check Department, and the Navigation Board, who have offices in the same building. It used to be a great point of humour with the wits of twenty years since to say that the appointments in the Tin-Tax Office were given to sons of the faithful butlers of patriotic peers, and to those eager constituents for whose placing-out in life the Members for Irish boroughs are always petitioning with energy and perseverance worthy of the horse-leech's daughters. And, indeed, the manners and customs of some of the middle-aged clerks bear testimony to the truth of this report. They were good enough fellows in their day—blundered on at their offices from ten till four; dined cheaply at Short's, or Berthollini's, or the Cock; went half-price to the Adelphi; occasionally supped at the Coal-Hole or the Cider Cellars; and went home to their garrets in Islington with the perfect idea that they were roystering dogs, and that the world did not contain many men who had drained pleasure's goblet more thoroughly to the dregs than themselves. Most of them married betimes—occasionally the landlady of their lodgings; more frequently

The pallid daughter of some fellow-clerk, after a flirtation begun over a round game or "a little music;" most frequently some buxom lass met at seaside boarding-house, or in the old paternal home, where they spent their leave of absence. But we have changed all that; and junior clerks of the present day are thoroughly and entirely different from their predecessors: the establishment of the Civil-Service Commission, and the ordination of promotion by merit, have sent quite a different class of men into the public service, and the subordinate appointments of the Tin-Tax Office are held by men who have taken their degrees at Oxford; who can turn "Vilikins and his Dinah" into Greek iambs; who can tell you where Montenegro is, and what it wants; who have thoroughly mastered the Schleswig-Holstein question; who are well up in the theory of thermo-dynamics; and who dip into Jean Paul Richter for a little light reading;—all excellent accomplishments, and thoroughly useful in the Tin-Tax Office.

It is half-past twelve on a fine Saturday morning in the beginning of October, and the six occupants of room No. 120 are all assembled, and all at work; that is to say, four of them are writing, one is looking vacantly out of the window, and one is reading the *Times*. No. 120 is at the top of the building; a pleasant room when you reach it, looking on to the river, but up four flights of steep stone stairs. No. 120 has always its regular number of occupants; for when the chief clerk learns that a young gentleman has an undue number of friends calling upon him during official hours, he causes the popular man to be removed to No. 120, and after two trials of the stairs the visitors prefer meeting their friend in the evening at some less Alpine retreat. So also, when a young gentleman is in the habit of being perpetually waited upon by duns, he makes interest to get moved into No. 120, and finds that his creditors simultaneously urge their demands not in person, but through the medium of the Post-Office. The head of the room is Mr. Kinchenton, that tall man with the rounded shoulders, and grizzled head ever bent

over his desk. Hard work has bowed Mr. Kinchenton's back and silvered his hair; for he has been in the Tin-Tax Office since he was sixteen years old, and though promoted under the old system of seniority and length of service, no one could ever say that he had not fairly won every step he got. Before he was sixteen, he was the hope and pride—the prize scholar—of the Heckmondike Grammar-School, his father being head-keeper to Lord Heckmondike, who placed the boy on the foundation of the school, and, finding him apt and studious, obtained for him his appointment from the Government of the day. No Adelphi at half-price, no Cider Cellars or Coal-Hole, for young Kinchenton, who had a little bedroom in a little terrace close by Kennington Common, where he was to be found every night, book in hand, and happy as a prince. A poor little bedroom enough!—a wretched little bedroom, with a white-dimity-covered tester-bed, two rush-bottomed chairs, a painted chest of drawers, a rickety washhand-stand, and a maddening square of looking-glass hanging against the wall. But to that garret came Sancho Panza and the gaunt Don his master; came Gil Blas, and the beggar with his arquebuse, and the Archbishop of Grenada; came cringing Tartuffe, and preposterous Sganarelle; came wandering Rasselas and sage Imlac; came Ferdinand Count Fathom, swearing Tom Pipes, and decorous Mr. Blifil. There the hardworking clerk laughed over Falstaff's lovemaking and Malvolio's disgrace, or wept over Sterne's dead ass and Le Fevre's regained sword; while his comrades Mace and Flukes were ruining each other at billiards, and Potter and Piper were hiccuping noisy applause to indecent songs.

When Mr. Kinchenton was forty years old, his income had reached the bewildering amount of four hundred a year, and he thought he might indulge in the luxury of a wife; so he took to himself a pretty little soft-eyed girl, the daughter of an old gentleman who was a traveller in the straw-bonnet line, and who, when he was not driving about in a very high four-wheeled trap which did its best to look like a mail-phæton and signally failed in the

attempt, lived in the little terrace next door to Kinchenton's lodgings. After his daughter's marriage, the old gentleman, who was a widower, gave up travelling, retired upon his savings, and went to live with his son-in-law in a little house which Kinchenton had taken in Camden Town, where the birth of a son crowned Kinchenton's happiness. His adoration of this child was his weakest point: he was always narrating its wonderful deeds to every body; and the men in the office, with whom the little fellow was really a favourite, knew they could always get late attendance overlooked or half-holiday granted if they asked after little Percy, and sent him some trifling present.

It is well for the junior clerks of No. 120 that Mr. Kinchenton is the head of the room; for the next in seniority, Mr. Dibb, is by no means a pleasant person. Harsh, stiff, sectarian bigotry lurks in his coarse, close-cropped black hair, and in the plaited folds of his huge white neck-cloth; he invariably wears a black dress-coat, waistcoat, and trousers, creaking boots, and damp cloth gloves. He is always ailing, and invariably changing his medical system: now vaunting the virtues of blue-pill, now swearing by homœopathy; he has been rubbed and cracked and shampooed and galvanised; and once he tried hydropathy, but came back in a week from Malvern no better, and apparently no cleaner, than before his visit to Dr. Gully. He was one of the first-fruits of the noble system of promotion by merit, having been transferred to Rutland House from some provincial stronghold of the Tin-Tax Office, and report said that he had originally been a schoolmaster in Bilston. He was hated by nearly all his juniors, but respected by the heads for his conscientiousness and power of work; and he was located in No. 120 to neutralise, to some extent, Mr. Kinchenton's excess of good nature. The rank and file of No. 120 consisted of Mr. Prescott and Mr. Pringle, junior clerks; Mr. Boppy, an old gentleman with a bald head and a double eyeglass, who had arrived, through dint of long service, at a good income, who was utterly

useless, and who had no characteristic save his intense dread of his wife; and Mr. Crump, who had been for twenty years an extra clerk, and who, owing to an invincible stutter, had never been able to interest any one sufficiently to procure him an appointment.

"Devilish hot!" said Mr. Pringle, a short, good-humoured-looking young man, laying down his *Times* and opening his waistcoat; "devilish hot! Crump, there's a good fellow, open the door."

Mr. Crump looked up from his work, and said appealingly, "I've got a st—a st—a st—" he would have said "stiff neck;" but long before he could reach the word, Pringle interrupted him—

"Strong hand; you've got a strong hand, I know, and the door sticks; that's why I asked you. Boppy, my boy, I've not yet had time to ask you how you are."

"Well, I'm well in health, thank you, Mr. Pringle," said Mr. Boppy, depositing his pen on the desk, and rubbing his bald forehead; "but I'm rather worried in my mind."

"What troubles my Boppy? Has the Bank reduced its rate of discount, so that my Boppy's ingots are not worth quite so much per cent as they were yesterday: or is it love that is sending him to grief? Has my Boppy been sporting with Amaryllis in the shady side of Brompton Row, and has Mrs. B. found it out? Oh, Bop!"

"Nonsense, Mr. Pringle! I—"

"I must say that such remarks as those," interrupted Mr. Dibb, "appear to me to be very bad jokes."

"Very likely, Mr. Dibb," retorted Pringle; "but that's because you're the quintessence of humour yourself. We can't all hope to make ourselves as thoroughly genial and pleasant as you—can we, Crump?"

"I d—decline to s— to s— to say—"

"To say ditto to Dibb! Of course: you're my friend, and I knew you'd never desert me. Now, Boppy, you were about to say something when you were interrupted in that gentlemanly manner by our friend J. Miller; what was it?"

"Oh, I was merely thinking that I'd try and take that dog home this afternoon, and I'm rather doubtful as to how my wife will receive it. You see, I bought him a week ago, and Simmons, the hall-porter here, has kept him for me in the coal-cellar since then. He's a white Pomeranian dog, and the coal-cellar don't suit him somehow; but I daren't take him to Putney until I'd somewhat prepared Mrs. B.'s mind. So last night I read her several anecdotes of dogs, where they were all faithful and friendly and clean, you know; and this afternoon I shall take Spitz home, and—and say you gave him to me, I think, Mr. Pringle, if you've no objection."

"Certainly, if you like it, I don't mind; any thing you please, Boppy, my boy. Dogs as many as you like, and things of that sort; only, if Mrs. B. ever finds white-kid gloves, or locks of hair, or patchouli-scented pink notes, don't say they come from me—you understand? By the way, that reminds me. Prescott! p'st! Prescott!"

A tall, good-looking man of two or three-and-twenty, who was leaning his head on one hand and staring out of the window, turned round and said dreamily, "What?"

"What an amusing companion you are!" said Mr. Pringle; "what a charming remark that was when you last spoke, an hour and twenty minutes ago! What was it?"

"Don't be an idiot, Pringle!"

"No, it wasn't that; to be told to avoid an impossibility would have struck me as novel. Never mind; I was going to ask who that was I saw you speaking to at the King's Cross Terminus yesterday."

"At King's Cross?" said Prescott, colouring; "oh, that was a friend of mine, a clergyman."

"Ah!" said Pringle, quietly, "I thought so. He had on a blue bonnet and a black-lace shawl. Neat foot he's got; those parsons are always so particular about their stockings!"

"Don't be an ass, George!" growled Prescott, in an undertone.

"All right, old boy!" said Pringle, in the same key. "Forgot we weren't alone. Nobody heard, I think; but

I'll soon change the subject;" and he commenced whistling *Il Bacio*, loud and shrill.

"Mr. Pringle! Mr. Pringle!" screamed Mr. Dibb.

Mr. Pringle held up his hand as if deprecating interruption until he had come to the end of the bar, when he said, with mock politeness, "Sir to you!"

"How often have I begged you, sir, not to whistle during official hours? It is impossible for me to write my minutes while you're whistling."

"Write your minutes!" said Mr. Pringle. "Sir, we have the authority of A. Tennyson, Esquire, the Poet of the Age, if my honourable friend in the Isle of Wight will so permit me to call him, for saying that

'Lightlier move the minutes fledged with music.'

Though that even my whistling could make your minutes move lightly, with due respect to Alfred, I doubt."

"Mr. Kinchenton," cried Mr. Dibb, now a dirty white with rage, "I must request you, as head of this room, to call upon Mr. Pringle not to forget himself."

"My dear sir," said Pringle, "there's no one I think of so much."

"George," said Mr. Kinchenton quietly, "pray be quiet!"

"Certainly, Padre; I'm dumb! Thank Heaven and the Early Closing Association, to-day's a half holiday, and we cut it at two."

"Ah, to be sure!" said Kinchenton, anxious to atone for even the slight show of authority which his previous words might have suggested; "there are grand doings this afternoon at the Eyres', at Hampstead. I'm going to take my Percy there. Athletic sports, running, leaping, and all the rest of it."

"Ha! ha!" said Pringle; "at the Eyres', eh?"

'The merry brown Eyres come leaping,'

as Kingsley has it. What a pity they haven't asked me!"

"You're going, Prescott, I suppose?" asked Kin-

chenton. "The Eyres are friends of yours—you're going to their fête?"

"I! no, Padre," was the reply; "I'm not going."

"Oh, he's very bad!" said Pringle, in a whisper. "He's got it awfully, but he'll get better."

'Now he has turned himself wholly to love and follows a damsel, Caring no more for honour, or glory, or Pallas Athené.'

Kingsley again—hem!"

"I wonder, Mr. Pringle," said Mr. Dibb, "that you do not attempt to form some more permanent style of reading than the mere poetry, scraps of which you are always quoting. For my own part, I consider poetry the flimsiest kind of writing extant."

"I'm surprised at that, now," said Pringle placidly. "I should have thought that you would have been a great appreciator of the gloomy and Byronic verse. To understand that properly, you must have lost all digestive power; and you know, Mr. Dibb, that your liver is horribly out of order."

A general laugh followed this remark, in which even Mr. Kinchenton joined, and at which Mr. Dibb looked more savage than ever. In the midst of it the clock struck two, and at the last sound Mr. Crump closed his blotting-book, put on his hat, and vanished, saying "G-good" as he passed through the door; two minutes afterwards, fragments of the word "d-day" were heard reverberating in the passage. Simultaneously Mr. Boppy struck work and went to look after his dog, Mr. Dibb started off without a word, and Mr. Prescott took off his coat to wash his hands previous to departure. When he emerged from the washing cupboard, he found Pringle waiting for him: both the young men shook hands with their chief, sent their loves to Mrs. Kinchenton and the boy, and turned out into the Strand.

They had not gone far when Pringle asked his companion whither he was bound. Prescott was too absorbed to hear the question, but, on its repetition, mut-

tered something about an "engagement out Kensington way."

"Ah!" said Pringle, with the nearest approach to a sigh, "ride a cock horse, eh? the old game! Look here, Jim, old fellow. I'm not clever, you know, but I know how many blue beans make five; and I'm not strait-laced or pious or any thing of that sort, but I'm very fond of you, and I tell you this won't do!"

"What won't do?" asked Prescott, with a flaming face.

"Why, this Kate Mellon business, Jim. It's on hot and strong, I know. You've been down in the mouth all the time she was away; you met her at the station yesterday, and probably you're going up to her place today. Now you know, Jim, I've seen more of life than you, and I tell you this is all wrong."

"Why, you don't imagine that there's any thing—?"

"I don't imagine any thing at all. I haven't got any imagination, I think. I'm the most matter-of-fact beggar that ever walked; but I know you're confoundedly spooney and hard hit, and in a wrong quarter. Now, Jim, pull yourself together, old man, and cut it."

"I can't, George," groaned Prescott, raising his hat and tossing the hair back from his forehead; "I can't. You don't know how I love that woman, old fellow. I'd die for her; I'd go out and be shot at once, if it would save her a pang. I hate any one to come near her, and I'm always thinking of her, and longing to be with her."

"I felt just like that once for a female tobacconist in Briggate, at Leeds," said Mr. Pringle after a pause. "Deuced nice girl she was too, and what thundering bad cigars she sold! I'm very glad I didn't die for her, though. I got my appointment just in time, and came up to town without asking her to fly with me to distant climes. She wouldn't have known what 'climes' meant, I think. Now, look here, Jim; you'd better do something of the same sort. Apply for sick-leave (Glauber will give you a certificate), and go home and have some

shooting, and stay with your people, and you'll come back cured. Only cut it at once. Don't go there to-day; come with me. I've got a little business to do that won't take half an hour, and then I'm going to spar with Bob Travers, and you shall see me polish him off with a new 'Mendoza tip' that I learnt last night. Now, you'll come, won't you, Jim?"

"Not to-day, George. I know you're right in every word you say; and yet I can't give it up yet—at all events to-day. I must see her, I've got something special to say to her, and the time's getting on. Good-by, old fellow; I know you mean well; and I'll come out all right yet. God bless you, old boy! Hi! Hansom!" and Mr. Prescott jumped into a cab, murmured an inaudible address to the driver, and was whirled away.

Mr. Pringle remained on the kerb-stone, shaking his head and looking after the departing Hansom. "James Prescott is in for it," said he to himself, "is decidedly in for it. So, by the way, is George Pringle. If I don't pay Wilkins that twenty pounds to-night, I shall be County-Courted, as safe as houses. I never have put my hand to any bill before; but needs must, I suppose. So I'll just step up and see old Scadgers." And Mr. Pringle struck across the Strand, in a northerly direction.

CHAPTER XI.

WITH THE SECRETARY.

IF, instead of ascending the broad staircase immediately on entering the Tin-Tax Office, you were to proceed straight forward, you would come to the messengers' lobby, which is the outpost, protecting the penetralia where the Commissioners and the Secretary are enshrined. The principal duty of these messengers, besides answering bells and carrying about official papers, was to protect the august personages just referred to from being intruded upon by "the public;" and as one learnt from his Scripture History that the term "Gentiles" meant "all nations except the Jews," so, after a very little official experience, one became aware that "the public" meant every body who did not hold an appointment in the Tin-Tax Office. The duties incumbent upon certain emissaries of the Office, in regard to the collection of revenue, made the head-quarters at Rutland House a grand resort of the "public," who generally came here with very belligerent intentions, and who either referred to printed documents in their hands and wished to see Mr. Simnel the Secretary (whose name appeared attached to the documents), or occasionally even demanded an interview with the Chief Commissioner, the great Sir Hickory Maddox, himself. It is needless to say that these wishes were never gratified: the messengers of the Tin-Tax Office were men to whom, in the discharge of his favourite accomplishment, Ananias could not have held a candle; men with imperturbable faces and ready tongues, who took the "public's" measure in an instant, and sent him to whatsoever clerk they thought would most readily dispose of his grievance. "I

wish to see the Chief Commissioner," would exclaim a Briton, red in face, dripping in head, and bursting with indignation. To him calm, majestic Mr. Potts, the chief messenger, a fat man with a big forehead, a large stomach, flat feet in low shoes, and a general butlerish appearance—"Sir 'Ickry is with the Chanc'r of Schequer, sir, on most important bisness." "The Secretary, then." "The Seckittary have gone with Sir 'Ickry, sir;—what is your bisness, sir?" "Why, I've been overcharged—" "Ah, thought so, sir! Rebate on prop'ty dooty. Walker, show the gentleman to number 15,"—and away down the loud-resounding passages, or up the mountainous stairs, would the unfortunate "public" be hurried.

The superior rooms lay up a little passage to the right of the messengers' lobby, and were three in number. First came the Board-room, a large and solemn salmon-coloured apartment, where the Commissioners sat when for despatch of business assembled. A big, dull-faced clock ticked on the mantelshelf; solemn green maps of distant countries, from year's end to year's end undisturbed, curled themselves round in dusty layers on the walls; and a large red-leather sofa, on which Mr. Beresford, in the absence of the other Commissioners, and after a hard night's waltzing, had enjoyed hours of pleasant repose, filled up a recess. In the centre of the room stood a heavy writing-table, with pads of blotting-paper, pools of black ink, and bundles of quill-pens distributed at regular intervals. At the head of this table always stood a red-leather arm-chair, and this arm-chair always on business occasions contained the sacred person of the Chief Commissioner, Sir Hickory Maddox. A little man, Sir Hickory, with a parchment face, a blue eye like a bit out of a china plate, stiff gray hair brushed into a point on the top of his head, and formal little gray whiskers: always dressed in a little black frock-coat, and little gray waistcoat and trousers; wearing too a heavy gold-set cornelian seal, and a cumbrous old-fashioned watch-key, just projecting from his fob,—buoys to show whereabouts his thick gold chronometer was sunk, in some unknown depths. A kind-hearted, fussy,

hard-working man, whose family had been for generations in the public service, who had himself worked for years in the Draft and Docket Office, had risen and distinguished himself there, and had finally been rewarded with the Chief-Commissionership of the Tin-Tax, and with being created a K.C.B. His official position he esteemed one of the most enviable in the kingdom; he thought of nothing but official matters; and when, being of a hospitable turn, he had solemn dinners at his house in Wimpole Street, all the guests were magnates of other offices or—for he was a kind chief in that respect—juniors of the Tin-Tax. And invariably, just as the cloth was drawn, the butler would appear at his master's elbow, bearing a salver, on which lay an enormous red-leather official despatch-pouch. The little man would smile feebly at his guests, would shrug his shoulders, and saying, "Our labours follow us even here," would unlock the pouch, glance at its contents (probably the *Globe*, and private note), and relocking it, say, "Lay it on the library-table, Benson. I must go into the matter before I sleep. However, *nunc vino pellite curas!* Port, sherry, madeira, and claret!"

Between Sir Hickory Maddox the senior, and Mr. Beresford the junior, there were two other Commissioners. One was the Honourable Morris Peck, who had been a Gentleman Usher at Court,—at whose name years ago young ladies used to blush, and matrons to gather themselves together in brood-hen fashion for the protection of their chicks,—a roysterer at Crockford's, a friend of Pea-Green Payne and the Golden Hall and that lot,—a "devil of a fellow, sir!" but who was now merely a hook-nosed old gentleman in a high coat-collar and a curly-brimmed hat; wearing false teeth, dyed hair, and blacked eyebrows; who always slept peacefully until his signature was required, when he gave it in a very shaky schoolboy scrawl. The other was Mr. Miles O'Scardon, an Irish gentleman of ancient family, but limited means, who had represented Ballyhogue in Parliament for years, and who had obtained his appointment for the fidelity with which he had always obeyed the summons of the ministerial

whip. Beyond the Board-room lay the sanctum of the Chief-Commissioner's private secretary, a young man always chosen for his good looks, his good clothes, and his gentlemanly bearing, who was envied by his brother juniors, but who had to answer Sir Hickory's bell, and was consequently taunted by the epithet "Jeames." And beyond that, though unconnected with it, lay the Secretary's room.

A large, light, airy room, far away from the noise and bustle, and looking on to the river. Round the walls are huge oak-presses, filled with tied-up bundles of confidential papers, secret reports of the out-door agents of the Tin-Tax Office, which, if published, would have astonished the world by throwing quite a new light on the incomes of several of its idols. Maps were there too, and framed tables of statistics, and the Stationers' Almanac; and over the mantelpiece hung a proof-before-letters engraving of the portrait of Sir Hickory Maddox, after Grant, with an exact likeness of that great official's favourite inkstand and quill-pen, and with a correctness in the fit of the trousers such as was never achieved by the great original. There was a round table in the middle of the room, divided into two equal portions by a line of books of reference—Guide-books, M'Culloch's Commercial Dictionary, Haydn's Dates, the Post-Office Directory, Bradshaw, and other light reading: one side of the line of demarcation was bare (save at one o'clock, when it bore the little tray containing the Secretary's light luncheon); on the other lay the Secretary's blotting-book, pen-stand, and paper-case.

About the time when the conversation recorded in the last chapter was going on between his clerks, Mr. Simmel, the Secretary, sat in his official room, signing his name to printed papers, which he took one by one from a large heap at his right hand, and, after signing, dropped at his feet. It was plain that his thoughts were otherwise absorbed; for as the sheets fell from his hand and fluttered to the ground, he never looked after them, but would occasionally pause in his occupation, lay down

his pen, nurse his right leg with both hands, and rock himself quietly to and fro. As he moved here and there in the sunlight, you might have perceived that his limbs were long and ungainly; that he had big broad hands with thick corrugated veins, and finger-nails strong, hard, and cut to a point; that he was very bald, and that such fringe of hair as remained was of a dull red; that he had a large sensual face, big projecting brown eyes, thick clumsy nose, full scarlet underlip, heavy jowl, and large massive chin. You could have noticed, too, that, in certain lights, this face was worn and jaded and almost haggard, traversed here and there with deep furrowed lines, marked with crow's-feet and wrinkles and deep indentations. As you gazed, perhaps, all this faded away, the face beamed forth happy, jolly, sensual as ever; but you felt that the wrinkles were there, and that so soon as the flicker passed away, they would be seen again.

Not in the discharge of his easy labours at the Tin-Tax Office had Mr. Simnel acquired these lines and wrinkles. The calm direction of that engine of the State had only come upon him of late years, and never had caused him any trouble. But Mr. Simnel had compressed a great many years' experience into forty years of life, and the crow's-feet and indentations were the result of brain-labour, worry, and anxiety. Mr. Simnel's first recollection of any thing found him a little boy, in a skeleton-suit, at the grammar-school of Combeardingham,—a city which every body save the envious inhabitants of its rival Dockborough allowed to be the metropolis of the north. Little Bob Simnel did not know whose son he was, or how his schooling was paid for; all he knew was, that he boarded with an old lady, the widow of a tax-collector, who was very kind to him, and that he soon found out the best thing he could do was to stick to his book. To his book he stuck manfully; walked through all the classes of the grammar-school, one by one, until he became junior boy of the sixth form, until he became senior boy of the sixth form, until the visiting examiner, the Bishop of Latakia, New Zealand, declared that he

had the greatest pleasure in naming Mr. Robert Simnel as the gainer of the exhibition of seventy-five pounds a year; and added, as he shook hands with said Robert, that whichever University he might prefer would be honoured by his choice. Young Mr. Simnel, however, did not go to either Oxford or Cambridge: after a lengthened interview with the head-master, the Rev. Dr. Barker, Mr. Simnel gracefully resigned the exhibition in favour of Swetter, *major*, who “proxime accessit,” and entered as the articled clerk of Messrs. Banner and Blair, accounted the sharpest lawyers in Combeardingham, and known through all the county as great electioneering agents for the Liberal party. A few years passed on; Mr. Simnel had finished his articles, had become the junior partner of Messrs. Banner and Blair, and was working steadily and well, when an event happened which insured his success for life.

It was this: Combeardingham, for the three last general elections, had returned the same two members—Sir Thomas Prodd and Mr. Shuttler; both local magnates, employing hundreds of hands, supporting local charities, known throughout the county, and Liberal to the backbone. One morning news sped to London that Mr. Shuttler was dead; and that evening a tall, thin gentleman, with a hare-lip, arrived by afternoon express in Combeardingham, and engaged the Waterloo Hotel as the head-quarters of Mr. Farquhar, the Conservative candidate. Blue bills on a dead-wall unpleasantly proclaimed this fact to Mr. Simnel as he was shaving himself the next morning; and he perceived that young Woofham, the hope of the Liberal party, would not be brought in without a struggle. So he, metaphorically, took off his coat and set to work; canvassed, intrigued, cajoled, went through all the dirty round of electioneering tactics, but found he did not make much way; found, in truth, that the hare-lipped man seemed to have Fortunatus’s purse somewhere about him, and that young Woofham was a miserly young hunk, who did not see the borough as a proper investment for his ingots. What

was to be done? To lose the borough would be a tremendous blow to the Government, who had always looked upon it as their own, and to whom it was always supposed to owe allegiance. But the money? The night before the nomination, Mr. Simnel, with his face muffled in a huge handkerchief, despatched the following telegraphic message to Mr. Weal, the Government whip, at the Retrenchment Club: "No. 104 is putting on the steam at Combeardingham. If No. 102 does not do likewise, up goes the sponge." While No. 102 Mall-Pall is the Retrenchment Club, No. 104 is, it is needless to say, the No Surrender (familiarily known as the Wig and Whiskers), the head-quarters of the Conservative party. By the early morning express a messenger, with a letter from Mr. Weal, arrived at Mr. Simnel's office, and during the day the doubts under which many of the electors suffered were satisfactorily explained away, and at the close of the poll Mr. Woofham's name stood well ahead of his rival. Mr. Weal and his party did not forget their telegraphing friend at Combeardingham. After the election was over, Mr. Simnel was summoned to London, had an interview with certain of the *Di majores*, and at the end of six months was inducted into the Secretaryship of the Tin-Tax Office, then vacant.

They did not like him at first at the Tin-Tax; they thought Bingham ought to have succeeded to the berth; and Bingham—who was a very gouty old gentleman, who took a great deal of snuff, and swore a great deal, and kept a pocket-dictionary in the right-hand top-drawer of his desk wherewith to correct his orthography—thought so too. But Sir Hickory Maddox, who was not merely very popular, but very much respected by his men, showed such thorough appreciation of Mr. Simnel's talents, and so thoroughly endorsed all the Secretary's acts, that the men began to waver in their allegiance to the Bingham faction; to think that Bingham was little better than an old idiot; that "new blood" in the secretariat might probably not only improve the status of the Tin-Tax Office, but get a new and improved scale for the

clerks; and when they found that, after a couple of years, the new Secretary actually did accomplish this feat, the new Secretary was popular for ever. Popular officially, not privately. The juniors at the Tin-Tax had been in the habit of chaffing their late lamented secretary; of bribing him, by gifts of game and hothouse fruits, to grant them odd days and even weeks of leave of absence; of chatting with him familiarly on current events. Mr. Simmel's manners effectually checked all that kind of thing. With the Commissioners he might unbend; with the juniors he was adamant. But if he met one of his men in society, in the Opera lobby, or at a Botanical Fête, he would make a point of shaking hands with him as though they hadn't seen each other for ages, and of talking with him of every subject possible—except the Tin-Tax Office.

The pile of papers for signature had melted to one solitary document, the floor was strewn with the evidences of Mr. Simmel's handiwork, and Mr. Simmel himself sat nursing his leg and swaying himself gently to and fro in meditation. Occasionally he would pass his disengaged hand through his fringe of hair, and smile quietly to himself, then make a few figures on his blotting-pad, add them, and set-to rocking again. In the midst of this occupation he heard his door open, and looking up, saw Mr. Beresford.

"Why, what the deuce does this mean?" he exclaimed, in surprise. "I thought you were on Tom Tiddler's ground, picking up unlimited gold and silver, wooing heiresses, and settling a Belgravian ménage; and you turn up in this dingy old barrack. Is it all over?—has the lady succumbed? and do you want me to help you to choose fire-irons and window-curtains?"

Mr. Beresford did not reply for a minute; then he said, shortly and decisively, "I've been sold!"

Mr. Simmel gave one short, loud whistle, and said interrogatively, "Wouldn't?"

Mr. Beresford, seating himself on the edge of the table, looked up at Mr. Simmel, who had taken up his

position on the rug, with his back to the empty fireplace, and said, "No chance; booked beforehand!"

Whereupon Mr. Simnel gave a louder whistle, and said, "Tell!"

"You know how I stand, Simnel, well enough," said Mr. Beresford; "and this looked a very safe *coup*, I thought, specially after I got your telegram. There were two or three fellows staying down at Bissett who I thought were on, too. Man named Lyster; do you know him?—tall man, dark beard, yaw-haw beast, from Indian army."

"I know him!" was all Mr. Simnel's reply to this flattering sketch.

"And another man, newspaper man, belongs to the 'Retrenchment' and the 'Fly-by-night;' Churchill, you know."

"I know Churchill. Was he going in for an heiress?"

"No, not exactly; at least I thought so, but it turned out not. But I didn't like these fellows hanging about; specially Lyster—romantic party, sigh and that sort of business. So, when I found from you it was all right, I made up my mind to see where I was."

"Well; and Miss Townshend wouldn't have it?"

"Not at all! We were sitting after dinner, when the women had gone to the drawing-room, the very day I got your telegram, and old Wentworth told us there was a man coming down the next day,—Schrötter, or Schröder, a German merchant in Mincing Lane—"

"I know him," interrupted Simnel: "Gustav Schröder; elderly man. What took him to Bissett?"

"Love, sir—love! he's engaged to be married to Miss Townshend!"

"Whew!" said Mr. Simnel, with his longest and shrillest whistle. "The deuce he is! That *is* news! How does the young lady like it?"

"Well, not much. She couldn't, of course, be expected to feel very enthusiastic about a short, stout, gray-headed German, who talks the most infernal jargon, and hasn't got a sound tooth in his head. Took him

out shooting once, but he made the most awful mess of it; devilish near shot the beaters, and sprained his ankle leaping a half-foot ditch. The girl seemed horribly ashamed of him, and of his clumsy compliments and elephantine gambols; but she's evidently booked—her father takes care of that."

"Ah, ha!" said Mr. Simnel, nursing his knee, rocking himself to and fro, and rapidly going off into an absent fit; "ah, ha!"

"I hate to hear you say 'ah, ha,' Simnel!" said Mr. Beresford, with some asperity. "You're always up to some plottings and plans when you utter those seemingly benevolent grunts. I suppose you suspect old Townshend of some grand *diablerie* in this affair. I never could make out what it is that you know about that old gentleman."

"Know about him?" said Simnel, rousing himself with a laugh; "that he gives capital dinners and has plenty of money; that he's about to marry his daughter to one of the richest men in the City. What more need one know about a man? I don't know what church he goes to, or what peculiar shade of religion he affects; whether he's a good father or a bad one; whether he rules his daughter, or is ruled by her. But I *do* know that he drinks Tod-Heatly's champagne, and banks at the London and Westminster. This news looks fishy for your business, Beresford!"

"Simply a case of stump," said Mr. Beresford, rising from the table, plunging his hands into his trousers-pockets, and striding up and down the room.

"What do you mean to do?"

"Borrow two hundred pounds more of you," exclaimed Beresford, stopping short on the edge of the rug, and confronting Mr. Simnel.

"And then?" asked the latter gentleman, smiling calmly.

"God knows!" said Beresford, with something like a shudder. "Something must turn up; the Bishop must die or Lady Lowndes, and there'd be a safe something from them; or there'll be some girl—"

"Ye-es," interrupted Mr. Simmel drily, seating himself at his desk, and unlocking a draw therein. "You're the most marvellously sanguine fellow, perfectly Micawberish in your notions of something turning up, and your making a *coup*. But—suppose t'other! suppose it didn't come off! Now you owe me,"—looking at a paper which he took from the drawer,—“six hundred pounds already, and I've only got insurance policies for security.”

"You get your interest," growled Beresford.

"A mild six," said Mr. Simmel, with a shrug of his shoulders and his pleasant smile. "A mild six; just what I should get in Bombay Preference, or Great Luxembourg Centrals, or a dozen other safe investments. However, you shall have this two hundred; but I should be glad to see your way in the future. Is there no girl with money whom you think you could propose to speedily?"

"Not one," said Beresford, stopping in his walk and reseating himself on the table. "Oh, by Jove, I forgot to tell you that."

"What?"

"About Kate Mellon,—tremendous scene just before I left;" and Mr. Beresford proceeded to recount the dialogue between him and Kate Mellon, which was recorded in the fourth chapter of this story. He told the tale honestly throughout, and when he had finished he looked up in Mr. Simmel's face, and said, "Deuced awkward position, wasn't it?"

Mr. Simmel had not lost one word of the story; on the contrary, he had listened to it with the greatest eagerness and interest, but he did not answer Mr. Beresford's final query. He had fallen into his old, leg-nursing attitude, and was rocking himself silently to and fro.

"Devilish unpleasant, wasn't it?" reiterated Mr. Beresford.

"Eh!" said Mr. Simmel in a loud high key. "Yes, most unpleasant, of course. We'll talk more about that; but you must be off now. To-day's only half a day, you know; and I've got all sorts of things to do before I go.

You shall have that two hundred on Monday, all right. Good-by! see you on Monday;" and the Secretary shook hands with the Commissioner until the latter was fairly outside the door.

Then Mr. Simmel returned to his desk, and took up his leg again.

"It seems to be coming on now," he said to himself, "and all together too. The old man always meant little Alice for a Duke, and now to let her go to such carrion as old Schröder; that looks like smash. He holds heavily in Pernambucos, in Cotopaxis, and other stuff that's run down like water lately; and he must have dropped at least ten thousand in that blessed Bird-in-the-Hand insurance. I think the time has come to put the screw on, and I don't think"—turning to a drawer and taking from an envelope a paper yellow with age—"that he'll dishonour this. What an awful time ago it seems! There,"—replacing the paper,—“go back till you're wanted. You've kept so long that—Ah, by Jove! the other business! To be married, eh? To be married, Kate?" releasing his leg and plucking at his lips. "To be married to Master Charley Beresford! not while I live, my child! not while I live, and have power to turn a screw on in your direction too!"

CHAPTER XII.

WHERE MR. PRINGLE WENT TO.

IT has been notified in a previous chapter that Mr. Pringle was in some mental anxiety touching the acquisition of a certain twenty pounds which he required for immediate disbursement. This position he held in common with many of his colleagues at the Tin-Tax Office, and indeed with most junior clerks in the Civil Service. "The truth is," says Captain Smoke, in Douglas Jerrold's comedy, *The Bubbles of the Day*, "I want a thousand pounds." "My dear Smoke," says his friend, "there never was a man yet that did *not* want a thousand pounds." The truth of the axiom is undeniable; only in the Civil Service the amount is much diminished. Twenty pounds, familiarly known as a "twentyer," is generally the much-desiderated sum among the junior slaves of the Crown; and it was for a "twentyer" that Mr. Pringle now pined. A hosier who some two years before had sued for Mr. Pringle's custom, nor sued in vain,—who had supplied him with under-linen of fine texture and high price, with shirts of brilliant and variegated patterns, with boating jerseys and socks so vivid in stripe that his legs resembled those of the functionary in the opening of the pantomime who by the boys in the gallery is prematurely recognised as the future clown, owing to the resplendent beauty of his ankles,—at length, after repeated transmissions of his "little account," and after mystic hints that he had not yet seen the colour of Mr. Pringle's money, brought into action the terrible engines of the law, and summoned his debtor to the County Court.

It was at the very latter end of the quarter when this legal ukase was placed in Mr. Pringle's hands, and that gentleman, examining his capital, found it consist of thirty-seven shillings, a silver threepence, and a penny,—which sums were to provide his dinners, cigars, and general pleasures for a fortnight. Clearly, then, out of this no compromise could be effected; he could not even go through that performance so dear to the hard-pressed debtor, which is temporarily so soothing and in the end so futile, known as paying “something on account.” A five-pound note has the same effect on a tradesman to whom twenty pounds are owing as a wet brush on a very bad hat,—it creates a temporary gleam of comfort, *but nothing more*. Mr. Pringle had not even this resource: if he were summoned to the County Court, and if the investigation were reported, as it was sure to be, in *The Dalston Dreadnought and De Beauvoir Town Looker-on*, he should get horribly chaffed by his comrades, perhaps pitched into by the Board, and it would bring all his other creditors down on him. So something must be done, and cash must be raised at once. Mr. Pringle did not know where to turn: he had never been a borrower, and hated the idea of asking money favours from his friends; moreover, in real truth, he would not have known whom to turn to, had he been so minded. Prescott, his Pylades, was by no means overburdened with money—indeed, Mr. Pringle had reason to believe, was himself pressed by creditors; Kinchenton's income only sufficed for the keeping up of his modest establishment and for the schooling of Percy; while Dibb, Crump, Boppy, or any of the other office men, were utterly impracticable in such a case. Finally, he determined that he must “do a bill;” an act of which he had hitherto been innocent, and towards the proper accomplishment of which he thought it best to take the advice of Mr. Rittman.

In nearly every Government office there is one impecunious black sheep,—one clerk who is always hovering on the edge of the precipice of insolvency, over which

he finally tumbles, to creep out with life indeed, but with scars and bruises which last him during the remainder of his official existence. This character was in the Tin-Tax Office played by Mr. Rittman, who for years had been "in difficulties," and was thoroughly versed in every species of money-borrowing, were it the loan-simple from a friend, the loan-complex on a bill with a friend's name, the life-insurance facile, the loan-office ruinous, the bill of sale advertised, or the pawnbroker low. As yet no learned Commissioner had sat in judgment on Mr. Rittman's pecuniary transactions, but he had been in sponging-houses, in Whitecross Street, and in the Queen's Bench; and though his end was rapidly approaching (for he had a couple of sons verging on manhood, and apparently inheriting all their father's frailties), he was never despondent, but maintained a creditable appearance and a cheerful manner. To him Mr. Pringle had gone, on the day before that on which we first made his acquaintance; and Mr. Rittman, from the young man's manner on entering the room, at once guessed the object of his visit.

"How do, Rittman?" commenced Mr. Pringle.

"Good morning, my dear sir—good morning!" said the gentleman addressed, laying down his pen and bowing pleasantly. He had on a voluminous white waistcoat, a great show of shirt-wristband, and before him, in a tumbler, stood some choice flowers. "Seldom you come down to this part of the building; keep to the more aristocratic end—eh?" and Mr. Rittman smiled, and showed a good set of teeth.

"No! I don't know—the truth is—I want some advice, and I think you're the man to give it to me."

"My dear sir, I shall be delighted. What is it?" (this thrown off at a tangent to a messenger who appeared in the doorway, saying, "Ere's Brown's man agen, Mr. Rittman"). "Ah! Brown's man; well, you'd better say I've not yet returned from Jersey, but you expect me on Tuesday.—And now, my dear sir; you were saying—some advice?"

"Well, the fact is, Rittman, I'm hard up, and I want to borrow some money; and I thought you could—"

"Not lend you any? that would be almost too delicious, my dear sir. You didn't think I could lend you any?" and Mr. Rittman screamed with laughter at the absurdity of the idea.

"No, no, of course not; but I thought you might tell me where I could get it."

"Oh, that's a totally different thing; of course I can. I rather pique myself upon knowing more about such matters than most men. Of course I can. Now, let me see—what security can you give?"

"Eh?" asked Mr. Pringle.

"Security for the repayment? If you borrow from the Rainy Day or Amicable Nest-Eggs Insurance Office, you must give two sureties, householders, and insure for double the amount of the loan. If you go to the Helping Hand or the Leg-up Loan Office, you must give three sureties, householders, and pay a lot for office-fees and inquiries, which are made by a dirty-faced man at a pound a week. If you give a bill of sale on your furniture—"

"My good sir," said Pringle testily, "I've got no furniture. And surely all this bother can't be necessary for the sum I want—only twenty pounds."

"Twenty pounds! twenty pounds! a fleabite, a mere fleabite!" said Mr. Rittman (he had three and sevenpence in his pocket at the moment, and did not know in the least where to turn for more). "I hoped you were going to call my generalship into play; for I may say, without boasting, that when it's not for myself, I am fertile in resources. But—twenty pounds—I'll give you the address of a man who'll let you have it at once."

"There won't be any names wanted, or any thing of that sort, will there?" asked Pringle, rather doubtful of this promptitude.

"Nothing of the kind; merely your acknowledgment. Here's the address—Scadgers, Newman Street. You'll find Mr. Scadgers a curious man, but very pleasant; and

when you say you come from me, he'll be very polite. And, Mr. Pringle, let me give you one word of advice—Be firm in the matter of Madeira.”

“In the matter of Madeira?”

“Yes, awful; you can't stand it. Ostades are bad enough, or a Stradivarius fiddle; and perhaps, as you're a single man in apartments, a key-bugle mightn't do, as likely to be objected to by the other lodgers—but any of them rather than the Madeira.”

In the middle of Newman Street stands a paintless door, in the centre of which gleams a brass-plate, bearing the word “Scadgers,” in fat Roman capitals. Nothing else. No “Mr.,” no description of Scadgers' profession; nothing to break the charm. “Scadgers” stands an oasis of shining brass in a desert of lustreless deal, and winks knowingly at the double-faced portrait, one half dirty, the other half clean, at the picture-restorer's over the way. Scadgers' door differed from its fellows in having but one bell-handle; for Scadgers had quite enough business to occupy the whole house, and to demand ramifications in the neighbourhood. All we have to do, in the course of this story, is to deal with Scadgers as Scadgers; but my private belief is that Scadgers was the Universal Philanthropic Man's a Man for a' that Loan Office, held at the Blue Pig and Toothache in Wells Street; that he was “Cash promptly advanced on furniture without removal, freehold and leasehold property, legacies, reversions, warrants, and all other securities. Sheriffs' executions and rent-distrainment immediately paid out” (*vide* advertisement);—that he was “Methuselah's Muffin-Powder, or Never say Die” patent medicine, and proprietor-in-chief of “The Hob,” a domestic Miscellany, which commenced with weak romance, and failed, but has since achieved an enormous success for itself, and a fortune for its spirited proprietor, by the publication of “Baby Clarence; or, My Life at Brompton.” Certainly you could not have guessed Scadgers' occupation from the outside of his residence, which looked like a dirty lodging-house, like a third-rate boarding-house,

like those melancholy houses occupied by those most melancholy people on earth, third-rate piano-sellers; like a house let in rooms to people who lithograph fashion-plates; like any thing but what it was—a house where more money was made than in nine-tenths of the houses in London.

When Mr. Pringle arrived on the Scadgerian steps, he looked for a knocker, and finding none, he pulled the Scadgerian bell. A responsive click and the partial unlatching of the door invited him to push; the door yielded, and he found himself in a large and empty hall, on one side of which was a glass door, with the word "Office" in faded gilt letters on a white ground. This glass-door being open, Mr. Pringle walked straight through, and found himself in the "office." He had seen a good many offices in his time, but never one like this. He had never seen an office with musical instruments in it before; and here were four or five pianos standing ranged against the wall, to say nothing of harps in leather cases leaning drunkenly in corners, and a few cornets-à-piston in green boxes, and a guitar or two with blue ribbons to hang them round your neck by, just as if they had come fresh from the necks of Spanish *donnas*. And there were slack-baked-looking old pictures in heavy Dutch-metal frames—fine specimens of old masters—saints with skulls and Bibles in front of them, and very ascetic cheek-bones and great phrenological development of talent and courage; Dutch boors standing on one leg and drinking glasses of ale, and yawning youths with an effect of shaded candle-light on their faces. There were modern pictures, too, of lakes and Thames scenery, and girls with fair hair, which, when compared with the old ones, looked as if they had been painted in milk-and-water; and there were three driving-whips in one corner, a set of harness across a chair, and the leather cushions of a brougham under it. There was a bronze umbrella-stand, formed by a dog holding a whip in his mouth, a big French clock, and a couple of chemist's bottles, red and green; and in the midst of all this confusion stood a

little shrivelled old man, with very white hair and a very red face—a dirty little old man, dressed in a rusty suit of black, who addressed Mr. Pringle in a rusty creaking voice, and wanted to know “his pleasure.”

“I—I wish to speak to Mr. Scadgers,” said Mr. Pringle, with a modesty and hesitation altogether strange to him.

“Ah!” said the little old man; “deary me! yes!” and then he seated himself on the edge of a wine-hamper, and began to count his fingers with great interest, as though not quite sure of the number he really possessed.

“Mr. Scadgers!” said Pringle, after a minute or two.

“Ah, yes! I’ll call him,” said the little old man, and rang a bell which lurked in the corner of the chimney-piece.

A great creaking of uncarpeted stairs under heavy boots followed this bell-ringing, and presently Mr. Scadgers entered the room. Mr. Scadgers’ appearance partook of the charming amenities of the prize-fighter and the undertaker: his hair was black and close-cropped, his face white, his nose red, one eye was considerably larger than the other, and one corner of his mouth had a peculiar upward twist. He was dressed in black, with a pair of dull leather boots reaching half-way up his thighs; and as he came through the door, he took a red silk pocket-handkerchief from the crown of his hat, and mopped his head.

“Servant, sir!” said Mr. Scadgers, surveying Mr. Pringle with his gleaming black eyes, and reckoning him up in a moment. “What may you want?”

“Well,” said Mr. Pringle, “I wanted a few minutes’ conversation; but private, if you please—”

“Oh!” interrupted Mr. Scadgers, “don’t mind Jinks; he’s safe enough—knows all my affairs—thoroughly to be trusted.”

“Well, then,” said Mr. Pringle, hesitating; then, with a desperate rush, “look here!—fact is—want money!”

“Ah!” said Mr. Scadgers, with something like admiration in his tone, “got it out with a rush, didn’t

you? That's the only way! Who told you to come to me?"

"Mr. Rittman, of the—"

"I know—Tin-tax Office. Do you belong to it? Thought so. Wretched office; lost a mint of money in that office. What salary do you get?"

Mr. Pringle mentioned that he was in the receipt of ninety pounds a-year.

"Ah! twenty-one eighteen and nine on the 5th of every third month—I know all about it! Now" mopping his head, "how much do you want?"

"Twenty pounds."

"Lor' bless me! and when do you want it?"

"At once!"

"Can't be done, sir! can't be done!" Violent mopping. "Haven't got any money in the house. Can't you look in next week, and I might let you have ten?"

Mr. Pringle roundly asserted that this would not do at all, and turned round towards the door.

"Stop, sir!" shouted Mr. Scadgers, making tremendous play with the red-silk handkerchief. "What a hasty young man you are! Look here,"—taking out his purse,— "here's a ten-pound note that I promised to young Stephens of the Wafer Office; he was to have been here by two; now its getting on for three, and he's not come. I might let you have that!"

"But that's only ten!" said Mr. Pringle.

"*Only* ten! what a way to speak of money! Wait, sir, wait; let us see what we can do. Any one likely to look in this afternoon to pay any interest, Jinks?"

"Too late now!" said Jinks, with brevity.

"Ah! too late—I dessay! Just look in the cash-box, Jinks, and see what's there; though I'm afraid it's not much. I should say there wasn't more than three pounds, Jinks!"

Mr. Jinks peered into a little cash-box on the desk before him, and answered, "Just three pound!"

"Ah! bring 'em out, Jinks; give 'em here. Let's see—ten and three's thirteen; and that only leaves me

seven-and-six to go on with till Monday! Never mind: you could have thirteen, Mr.—”

“But I want twenty!”

“Ah, so you do! Pity you don’t want some wine! I’ve got some Madeiry as would—but wine ain’t money, is it? There’s a splendid picture, now—a Murillo: you might take that.”

“Pictures are not more money than wine; are they?”

“Ain’t they? That Murillo’s worth ten pound, and any one would give you that for it. Ain’t there no one you could sell it to? You see you’re in such a hurry for the money, or you might offer it to the National Gallery, or some swell collecting of pictures might buy it, but you’re so pressed. Tell you what you might do, though,” said Mr. Scadgers, as though struck by a sudden inspiration: “you might pawn it.”

“How the deuce could I go lugging that picture about the streets to pawn it?” said Pringle testily.

“No, to be sure! Stay, look here! I dare say Jinks wouldn’t mind pawning it for you. Jinks, look here; just run with this round the corner, will you? Get as much as you can, you know.” And without more ado, Mr. Jinks put on a reddish-black napless hat, tucked the picture under his arm, and started off.

While he was gone, Mr. Scadgers asked Mr. Pringle what his name was, how long he had been in the office, where he lodged, and other home-thrusting questions; and presently Mr. Jinks returned without the picture, but with three sovereigns and a printed ticket, which he delivered to his master, saying, “Wouldn’t do no more than three.”

“Three!” said Mr. Scadgers. “Well, that’s nearer to twenty than we was, isn’t it? Now, Mr. Pringle,”—taking a slip of stamped paper from his pocket-book—“just you sign your name at the bottom here. All correct, you see. Fifth of next month,—promise to pay,—value received,—and all the rest of it; and I’ll hand you over sixteen pounds and the ticket; and when you get that picture out, you’ll have a treasure.”

"Oh, curse the picture!" said Pringle ruefully.

"Ah," said Mr. Scadgers, grinning, "that's what they all says. Cuss the picture! Well, if that ticket ain't any use to you, I don't mind giving you half a pound for it."

"I thought you had only seven-and-sixpence left?"

"No more I have, myself; but I might borrow half a pound from Jinks. What do you say? Ah, I thought so. Here, Jinks, put this little dockyment along with your other valuables. Here's the half pound, sir. Now let's look at your signature. George Townshend Pringle! Very nice. No relation to Mr. Townshend, of Austin Friars—the great Townshend?"

"He's my uncle," said Pringle. "I'm named after him."

"Indeed! named after him! A very capital connexion. Good morning, sir! good morning! I'll look in upon you on the fifth."

But after Mr. Pringle had gone, Mr. Scadgers still stood with the bill fluttering between his fingers, muttering to himself: "Sing'ler that! very sing'ler! For years I hadn't seen the Runner until yesterday, when I came across him in Cheapside; and now to-day I hear of him again. I wonder," added Mr. Scadgers, with a very sinister smile, "whether that little account between me and the Runner will ever be wound up? I've owed him one this many a year."

CHAPTER XIII.

MR. PRESCOTT'S PROCEEDINGS.

THE Hansom cab conveying Mr. Prescott went at a rapid pace along the Strand, through the Pall-Mall district, and by divers short cuts into Piccadilly. There was nothing to stop it; there were no blocks or stoppages; and as it was the dead season of the year, and every one was out of town, the Commissioners of Sewers were good enough to leave the roads alone; reserving until the traffic was in full play their right to erect gigantic, hideous hoardings in the most crowded thoroughfares. The streets were deserted, the public buildings shut up, dust and straw and dirty paper whirled about in the eddying gusts of the autumnal wind, and the entire appearance of London was dull and wretched. People had evidently been in doubt what to do about dress; and while some were in the faded gaiety of the just-departed summer, others were putting on an even shadier appearance in the creased and awkward garments of the previous winter. The doctors' carriages and the hack-cabs had the thoroughfares to themselves; the occupants of the former, always on the watch for the recognition of some favoured patient, sat back in their vehicles, engaged either in the perusal of some medical work, or in happy day-dreams of increased practice, studs of wearied horses, noble introductions, enormous fees,—all culminating, perhaps, in baronetcies and appointments at Court.

Of the hack-cabs seen about, but few were Hansoms; for at that season men who want to go quickly, and don't mind paying a shilling a mile, are at a discount. Now

and then a sun-tanned swell, whose portmanteau atop nearly obstructed the driver's sight, and who himself was but dimly visible among gun-cases, hat-boxes, and railway-rugs, might have been encountered, passing from one terminus to another; but the "reg'lar riders,"—the lawyer's clerk, with the tape-tied bundle of papers, who charges his cab to "the office;" the lounging swell; the M.P. dashing down to the House; the smug-faced capitalist, whose brain is full of calculation, and who sits the whole way to the City smiling at all and seeing none; the impecunious speculator, who rides in a cab because he cannot afford to be seen in an omnibus,—all these were away from London. And the four-wheelers, though laden, had but dreary burdens: the fortnight at Margate is over; no more morning dips, no more afternoon rambles on the sands, no donkey-backs, no pleasure-boats, no Pegwell Bay now! Paterfamilias is once more Hobbs and Motchkin's out-door at thirty shillings a week; the eight-roomed house in Navarino Terrace, Camden Town, resumes its wonted appearance; the children return to the "curriculum" of education at Miss Gimp's in the Crescent; and save the sand-covered little wooden spades which hang from the hat-pegs in the passage, naught remains of their maritime excursion.

Dreary, dreary, every where! Dreary down in old country mansions, where, while the men are pheasant-shooting in the woods, the ladies look dismally on what was lately the croquet-ground, where the gardeners are now busy sweeping up the leaves, and pressing them into huge barrows, and wheeling them away; where the trees stand out gaunt and brown, and where the ever-greens bordering the pleasant walks rustle with the autumnal winds; where the cracks, and flaws, and dampnesses of old country mansions begin to make themselves unpleasantly conspicuous; and where the servants, town-bred, commence to be colded, sniffy, to have shivers and "creeps." Dreary at the sea-side, where the storm-soaked, worm-eaten jetty, lately echoing to the pattering feet of children, or the sturdy tread of the visitor taking

his constitutional, is now given over to its normal frequenters—tarry-trousered men in blue jerseys and oil-skin sou'-wester hats, who are always looking out for some boat that never arrives, or some storm which always comes when they do not expect it; bills are stuck on the pleasant plate-glass bow windows so lately filled with pretty girls, rosy children, and parents who dined at two o'clock, and enjoyed their nuts and port-wine "looking over the sea;" and the proprietors of the lodging-houses, who have lived in damp back-kitchens since June, are once more seen above-ground. Dreary in Continental towns, where home-returning English are finding out that they have spent too much money on their trip, and bewailing the Napoleons left as a tribute to the managers of the Homburgh Bank; where the discomforts of the return sea-passage first assert themselves, and where couriers and innkeepers are going in for their last grand turn of robbery and swindle. Dreary, dreary, every where! but specially dreary in Hyde Park, at the Piccadilly gates, at which Mr. Prescott leaves his Hansom, and strolls into Rotten Row.

A blank desert of posts and rails and dry dusty gravel; a long strip of iron-enclosed sand and grit, with half a dozen figures in the three-quarter mile range to break the dull monotony. As Prescott mooned drearily along, at five-minute intervals he would hear the sound of a horse's hoofs, and turning rapidly, would find some easy-going steed doing its quiet sanitary business for its owner, a man who, either from circumstances or disposition, never quitted London, but was to be seen at some time or other of the day in the Row, no matter what might be the time of year. Interspersed with these were grooms, riding in that gloomy undress of wide-awake hat, short, stiff shirt-collar, and tight-fitting, yellow-clay-coloured trousers, trying the wind and bottom of some that were meant to be flyers in the approaching hunting-season; beasts with heavy, strong quarters, long backs, short, sharp heads, and rolling eyes, with a preponderance of white always showing. Country-bred is

Mr. Prescott, and cannot therefore divest himself of a certain canniness in the matter of horseflesh: now and then he leans over the rail to follow the progress of a horseman flying past, with his hands well down, and every muscle of his steed brought into splendid play; or the healthy gymnastics of a valetudinarian, who had learned exactly the utmost amount of exercise to be derived from his horse as compared with the least amount of discomfort to be endured by himself. But these do not rivet his attention; and he passes on until he is nearly abreast of the Serpentine, when, looking back, he sees a blue skirt fluttering in the wind, and in an instant recognising its wearer, pulls up by the rails and waits her advent.

It does not take long for that chestnut mare to cover the distance, albeit she is being ridden from side to side, and is evidently receiving her "finishing" in the elegancies of the *manège*. In less than two minutes she is pulled up short by the rails where Prescott is standing, and her rider, Kate Mellon, with the colour flushing in her cheeks, with her eyes aglow, with her hair a trifle dishevelled from the exercise, is sitting bolt upright, and with the handle of her riding-whip giving the young gentleman a mock salute.

"Servant, colonel!" says she.

"How do you do, Kate?" says Prescott, leaning forward and touching the neat little white cuff on her wrist; "I thought I should find you here."

"More than I thought of you!" says the lady. "Why ain't you counting up those figures, and adding and subtracting, and all the rest of it you do in your office, eh?"

"To-day's a half-holiday, Kitty—Saturday, you know," says Prescott, with rather a grim smile; for he does not like that rough description of his official duties.

"Oh, ah!" says the lady, with great simplicity; "Saturday, ah! Confounded nuisance sometimes! Lost my net veil one Saturday afternoon here in the Row; went to Marshall and Snelgrove's on my way home; all shut up tight as wax!"

"You're better than you were yesterday, at the station?"

"Oh, yes; I'm all right; I shall do well enough! Wo-ho! steady, old lady!" (this to the mare). "I'm always better in town. Don't let's stand here; I can't hold this mare quiet, and that's the truth; she frets on the curb most awful."

"Most awfully, Kitty, not most awful. I've told you of that a hundred times."

"Well, most awfully, if you like it better. Steady, Poll! Walk along by my side. Who are you, I should like to know, to pull me up about my talking? What right have you to lecture me about my grammar and that?"

"What right?" asks Prescott, suddenly turning white; "none, save the fact of my loving you, Kitty. You know it well enough, though I've never told you in so many words. You know that I *do* love you! You can't have seen me hanging about you during the last season, making excuses to come to your place, first there and last to go, hating every man who had more chances of talking to you than I had,—you can't have seen all this without knowing that I loved you, Kitty!"

The mare is pulled suddenly up; there is no one near them in the blank desert of the Row; and her rider says, "And suppose I *did* know it,—what then?"

Prescott shrugs his shoulders and looks upon the ground, but does not reply.

"Have you ever had one word of encouragement from me? Have you ever seen a look of mine which has led you on? Can you say that, suppose I tell you to let me hear no more of this,—as I do tell you at once and for ever,—I have deceived or thrown you over in any one way?"

"Never!"

"Thank God for that!" says the girl, with some bitterness; "for that's a chalk in my favour, at least. Now look here! I know you, James Prescott; and I know that you're too good a man—too well brought up and

fond of home and that sort of thing—to hint any thing but what's right towards me.”

“Kitty!”

“There—I know it. Don't break a blood-vessel with your emotion,” she added, gently tapping him on the shoulder with her riding-whip. “All right. Well, suppose we were married, you'd feel very jolly, wouldn't you, while you were down at your office doing your sums and things, which you got so riled when I spoke of just now, to think that Tom Orme, and Claverhouse, and De Bonnet, and a whole lot of fellows, were mooning about this place with me?”

“I'd wring all their necks!” says honest Jim Prescott, looking excessively wobegone.

“Exactly. But you see, if you wrung their necks, they would not send their wives and sisters and daughters to be taught riding at The Den; they would not commission me to look out for ladies' hacks, to break them, and bring them into order; and my trade would be gone. And we couldn't live on the twopence-half-penny a-year you get from your office, Jim, old fellow.”

“I know that, Kitty,” said poor Prescott; “I know all that; but—”

“Hold on half a second!” interrupted Kate; “let us look the thing straight in the face, and have it out, Jim, now and for ever. I know you—know you're a thorough-going good fellow, straight as an arrow, and know that if you married me, you'd stick to me till you dropped. But you'd have a hard time, Jim—an awful hard time!”

“I should not mind that, Kitty. I'd work for you—”

“Oh, it isn't in that way I mean. But how would you stand having to break off with your own people for your wife's sake? How could you take me down to your governor's parsonage, and introduce me there? How would my manners and my talk please your mother and sisters? It's madness, Jim,—it's worse than madness,—to talk of such a scheme. Shake hands, and let's be always good friends—the best of friends. If you ever want a good turn that I can do, you know where I'm to be

found. God bless you, old boy; but never mention this subject again!"

James Prescott gave a great gulp at a lump which was rising in his throat, and warmly grasped Kate Mellon's proffered hand. As she raised her eyes he noticed her colour fade, and saw a troubled expression in her face.

"Good by, Jim," she said hurriedly. "Just strike down that path, will you? Get away quickly; here's some one coming; and—and I don't want to be seen talking to you. Quick! there's a good fellow. Good by."

She touched her horse with her slight whip, and cantered off at once. Prescott looked in the direction she had indicated, and saw Mr. Simnel, mounted on a handsome thoroughbred, calmly curveting up the Row.

What could there be between Kate Mellon and Robert Simnel?

CHAPTER XIV.

MISS LEXDEN ON MATRIMONY.

AFTER that episode at the stile, which, as it happened, formed such a crisis in their destinies, Barbara Lexden and Frank Churchill did not move towards the house, but quietly turned into that fir plantation through which they had strolled some days previously on their return from the shooting party. At first neither spoke; Barbara walked with her eyes downcast, and Churchill strolled idly by her side; then, after a few paces, he took her unresisting hand and placed it in his arm. She looked up into his face with calm, earnest, trustful eyes, and he bowed his head until, for the first time in his life, his lips touched hers, and as he withdrew them he murmured, "My darling! my own darling! thank God for this!" His arm stole round her waist, and for an instant he held her tightly clasped; then gently releasing her, he again passed her hand through his arm, covered it with his other hand, and walked on quietly by her side. There was no need of speech; it was all known, all settled, all arranged; that restored glove, that one fervent sentence, that one look in which each seemed to read the secrets of the other's soul, had done it all. This was first love, undisturbed by the fact that on either side there had probably been some half-dozen attacks of that spurious article, that saccharine bliss, that state of pleasant torture which reveals itself in sheep-like glances and deep-drawn sighs, in a tendency to wear tight boots and to increase the already over-swollen tailor's bill, to groan and be poetical, and to shrink from butchers' meat. Al-

though the existent state of Barbara and Churchill had none of these characteristics, it was still first love.

Marvellous, marvellous time! so short in its duration, but leaving such an indelible impress on the memory! A charming period, a *hasheesh*-dream impossible ever to be renewed, a prolonged intoxication scarcely capable of realisation in one's sober moments. A thing of once, which gone never comes again, but leaves behind it remembrances which, while they cause the lips to curl at their past folly, yet give the heart a twinge in the reflection that the earnestness which outbalanced the folly, the power of entering into and being swayed by them, the youth—that is it, after all; confess it!—the youth is vanished for ever and aye. What and where was the glamour, the power of which you dimly remember but cannot recall? Put aside the claret-jug, and, with your feet on the fender, as you sit alone, try and analyse that bygone time. The form comes clearly out of the mist: the dark-brown banded hair, the quiet earnest eyes, the slight lissome figure and delicate hands; and with them a floating reminiscence of a violet perfume, a subtle, delicate essence, which made your heart beat with extra vigour even before your eyes rested on what they longed for. Kisses and hand-clasps and ardent glances were the current coin of those days; one of either of the former missed, say at parting for the night, for instance, made you wretched; one of the latter shot in a different direction sent you to toss sleepless all night on your bed, and to rise with the face of a murderer, and with something not very different from the mind of one. There were heartaches in those days, real, dead, dull pains, sickening longings, spasms of hope and fear; dim dread of missing the prize on the attainment of which the whole of life was set, a psychical state which would be as impossible to your mind now as would the early infantile freshness to your lined cheek, or the curling locks of boyhood to your grizzled pate. It is gone, clean gone. Perhaps it snapped off short with a wrench, leaving its victim with a gaping wound which the searing-iron of time has com-

pletely cicatrised: perhaps it mellowed down into calm, peaceful, conjugal, and subsequently paternal affection. But tell me not, O hard-hearted and worldly-minded bachelor, intent on the sublimation of self, and cynically enough disposed to all that is innocent and tender,—tell me not, O husband, however devoted to your wife, however proud of your offspring,—tell me not that a regret for that vanished time does not sometimes cross your mind, that the sense of having lost the power of enjoying such twopenny happiness, ay, and such petty misery, does not cost you an occasional pang. It still goes on, that tragi-comedy, the same as ever, though the actors be different, though our places are now in the cushioned gallery among the spectators instead of on the stage, and we witness the performance, not with envy, not with admiration, but with a strange feeling of bewilderment that such things once were with us,—that the dalliance of the puppets, and the liquid jargon which they speak, once were our delight, and that we once had the pass-key to that blissful world whose pleasures and whose sorrows now alike fail to interest us.

So in the thorough enjoyment of this new-found happiness, in all tranquillity and repose, as in a calm haven after tempest, three or four days passed over Barbara and Churchill. Their secret was their own, and was doubly dear for being known but to themselves. No one suspected it. Churchill joined the shooting-party on two occasions; but as he had previously been in the habit of detaching himself after luncheon, no one remarked his doing so now, and no one knew that the remainder of the day until dinner-time was spent with Barbara alone. After dinner Barbara would sometimes sing, and then Churchill would hover round the piano, perhaps with more *empressement* than he had previously shown (because, though fond, as every man of any sensitiveness must be, of music, he was by no means an enthusiast, and was racked wofully with smothered yawns during the performance of any elaborate piece), yet by no means noticeably. And during all the time each had

the inward satisfaction of knowing that their words and actions were appreciated by the other, and that the "little look across the crowd," as Owen Meredith says, was full of meaning to and thoroughly understood by the person it was intended to reach. At length, about the fourth day after the proceedings at the stile, their conversation took a more practical turn. They had been wandering slowly along, and had at length stopped to rest on a grass-covered bank which was screened from the sight of the distant house by a thick belt of evergreens, while far away in front of them stretched a glorious prospect of field and woodland. As sometimes happens in October, the sun seemed to have recovered his old July force, and blazed so fiercely that they were glad to sit under the friendly shade. Barbara had removed the glove from her right hand, and sat looking down at her lover, who lay by her side, idly tracing the course of one of the violet veins in the little hand which rested in his own broad palm. Suddenly he looked up and said :

"Darling, this lotus-eating is rapidly coming to an end. It would be sweet enough, thus 'propped on beds of amaranth and moly,' to remain and dream away the time together ; but there's the big world before us, and my holiday is nearly finished."

"And you must go back to town?" and the little fingers tightened round his, and the shapely head was bent towards his face.

"Yes, pet ; must. But what of that ? When I go, it is but to prepare for thee, my heart's darling ; but to set things straight for your reception. You're determined, child, to share my lot at once ? You've reflected on what I said the other night, about waiting a year to see whether—"

"No, Frank, no! those long engagements are utterly hateful. There will you be, I suppose" (and she glanced slyly at him), "moping by yourself, and there shall I be with another round of that horrible season before me, thinking of you, longing for you, and yet having to undergo all the detestable nonsense of balls and parties and

fêtes, which I so thoroughly despise—for what? At the end to find ourselves a year older, and you perhaps a few pounds richer. As though riches made happiness!" said poor Barbara, who, since she had come to what are called years of discretion, had never known what it was to have a whim unindulged.

Churchill raised himself on his elbow, and smiled as he smoothed her glossy hair.

"My child," said he, "have you never heard of the philosopher who, when told that poverty was no crime, rejoined, 'No; no crime; but it's deuced inconvenient'? Recollect, furnished lodgings in Mesopotamia, hack cabs to ride in, no Parker to dress your hair, no Rotten Row—by Jove, when I think of it, I feel almost inclined to rush off and never see you again, so horrible is the change to which holding to me must lead you!" and a dark shadow passed across his face.

"Do you?" asked Barbara, bending so closely over him that he felt her warm breath on his cheek; "do you?" she repeated with such a dash of earnest in her jesting tone that Churchill thought it necessary to slip his arm round her, and press his lips to her forehead in reassurance. "Why, you silly boy, you forget that when I was a child at home with papa, I knew what poverty was; such poverty as would make what you speak of wealth by comparison. Besides, shall we not be together to share it? And you'll buy me a—what do they call it?—a cookery book, and I'll learn all kinds of housekeeping ways. I can do some things already; Guérin, the Morrisons' *chef*—who was a little struck with me, I think, sir—showed Clara Morrison and me how to make an omelette; and Maurice Gladstone—my cousin Maurice, you know; when we were staying at Sandgate, he was quartered at Shorncliffe—taught me to do bashawed lobster, and he says my bashawed lobster is as good as Sergeant Phoeny's. And you know all the Guards are mad to get asked to sup with Sergeant Phoeny, who's a lawyer, you know, and not a soldier-sergeant."

And she stopped quite out of breath.

“ ‘You know’ and ‘you know,’ ” said Churchill, mocking her ; “ I do know Sergeant Pheeny, as it happens, and his bashawed lobster, and that dish and omelettes will doubtless be our staple food ; and you shall cook it, and clean the saucepans afterwards, you little goose. However, I tell you candidly, darling, though it sounds selfish, I *dare not* run the risk of losing you, even with all these difficulties before us. As you say, we shall share them together, and—”

“ Now, not another word ! ” said Barbara, placing her hand upon his lips ; “ there are to be no difficulties, and all is to be arranged at once. And I think the first thing to be done is for me to speak to my aunt.”

“ Ay,” said Churchill, with rather a dolorous expression of face ; “ I am afraid that will be what your friend Captain Lyster would call a ‘teaser.’ Talking about no difficulties—we shall find one there ! ”

“ I do not think so. I am sure, Frank, my aunt has shown special politeness to *you*.”

“ Yes, darling, politeness of a certain kind to people in my position. Don’t frown ; I have long since dropped that distinction as between ourselves. But I mean so far as the outer world is concerned, to people in my position—authors, artists, and ‘professional people’ of all kinds—mixing in society, there are always two distinct varieties of politeness. One, which seems to say, ‘You are not belonging to *nous autres* ; you are not a man of family and position ; but you bring something which is a distinction in its way, and which, so far as this kind of acquaintance goes, entitles you to a proper reception at our hands.’ The other, which says as plainly, ‘You don’t eat peas with your knife, or wipe your lips with the back of your hand ; you’re decently dressed, and will pass muster ; while at the same time you’re odd, quaint, amusing, out of the common run, and you present at my house a sort of appanage to my position.’ I think Miss Lexden belongs to the latter class, Barbara.”

“ I am afraid that old feeling of class-prejudice is a monomania with you,” said Barbara, a little coldly :

"however, I will see my aunt, and bring matters to an issue there at once."

"All luck go with you, child! There is one chance for us. The old proverb says, '*l'ennemi savant est toujours galant*.' Miss Lexden is a clever woman; perhaps has had her own love-affairs, and will feel pity for ours. But, Barbara, in case she should be antagonistic—violently, I mean—you will not—"

"*Monsieur*," said Barbara, with a little inflated *moue*, "*la garde meurt, mais ne se rend pas*, as Cambronne did not say. No, no; trust in me. And now give me your arm, and let us go home."

It was a point of honour with old Miss Lexden to have the best room in every house where she visited; and so good was her system of tactics, that she generally succeeded. Far away in northern castles, where accommodation was by no means on a par with the rank of their owners, duchesses had been worse lodged and infinitely worse attended to than this old commoner, whose bitter tongue and incapacity for reticence did her yeoman's service on all possible occasions; not that she was ever rude, or even impolite, or said any thing approaching to actual savagery; but she had a knack of dropping hints, of firing from behind a masked battery of complacency, and of roughly rubbing "raws," which was more effective than the most studied attacks. As spent balls, when rolling calmly along, as innocuous, apparently, as those "twisters" of Hillyer's, which evade the dexterous "dip" of the longstop on the smooth short sword of the Oval, have been known, when attempted to be stopped, to take off a foot, so did old Miss Lexden's apparently casual remarks, after to all appearance missing their aim, tear and wound and send limping to the rear any one who rashly chanced to answer or gainsay her. Women, with that strange blundering upon the right so often seen among them, seemed to guess the diabolical power of the old lady's missiles, and avoided them with graceful ease, making gentle *déclairs*, which led them out of harm's way, or cowering for shelter in elegant atti-

tudes under projecting platitudes ; but men, in their conscious self-strength, would often stand up to bear the brunt of an argument, and always came away worsted from the fight. So that old Miss Lexden generally had her own way amongst her acquaintance, and one important part of her own way was the acquisition of the greatest comfort wherever she stayed.

Of course, in an easy, regulated household like that of Sir Marmaduke Wentworth, there was no need of special strategy. Years ago, on her first visit, she had selected her apartments, and had had them reserved for her ever since. Pleasant apartments they were, large, airy, and with a glorious look-out across the garden over the surrounding downs. When the windows were open, as they always were when practicable during Miss Lexden's tenancy,—for the old lady was a great lover of fresh air,—the rooms were filled with the perfume of the flowers, occasionally mixed with fresh, healthy sea-smell. These had been the state-rooms in the Grange, in bygone times ; and when Miss Lexden first came there, there was a huge bed, with nodding plumes at the foot, and a great canopy, and high-backed solemn chairs, and a big wardrobe like a family mausoleum ; but the old lady had all these cleared away, and persuaded Sir Marmaduke to refurnish the rooms with a suite of light maple and moss-rosebud chintz, with looking-glass let into the panels of the wardrobe, and snug little low chairs scattered about ; and then with a chintz paper, and water-colour drawings in light frames, the place was so changed that the old housekeeper, who had been in the family for years, scarcely knew it again, and was loud in her lamentations over the desecration.

Miss Lexden was a lazy old lady, who always breakfasted in bed, and when staying on a visit at a country-house generally remained the greater portion of the day in her room. She was accustomed to say with great freedom that she did not amuse the young people, and they certainly did not amuse her, and that she hated all old people except herself. She was a great correspondent

of all kinds of people, wrote lengthy epistles in very excellent French to all kinds of refugees, who were perpetually turning up in different parts of Europe, and working the oracle for their own purposes; wrote lengthy epistles to American statesmen on the slavery question, to English lecturers on subjects of political economy, and to her special friends on all points of domestic scandal. I fear that, with the exception of the last, her correspondence was not much regarded, as she never sent to refugees any thing but her blessing and her prayers; and these, even though coming from an English *miladi*, were not discountable at any *Geld-wechsel Comptoir* on the Continent. But her *Chronique Scandaleuse* was delicious; it was bold in invention, full in detail, and always written in the most pointed and epigrammatic style. There were people who obtained autumn invitations on the sheer strength of their being recipients of Miss Lexden's correspondence. Extracts from her letters were read publicly at the breakfast-table, and created the greatest delight. "Good as a book, by Jove!" was a frequent comment on them; "full of humour, and that kind of thing; sort of thing that fellow writes and people pay money for, by Jove! ought to send it to *Punch*, that she ought." (For it is a thing to be noted, that if the aristocracy of this great country ever permit themselves to be amused, they invariably think that the thing which amused them, no matter of what kind it be, ought to be sent to *Punch*.) Miss Lexden also was a great reader of French novels; she subscribed regularly to Rolandi's, and devoured all that sound sense, morality, philosophy, and extensive knowledge of the world, which yearly issued from the Parisian publishers. In bygone times she had laughed heartily over the farcical humour of M. Paul de Kock; now that her palate had somewhat dulled, Fortune had sent her the titillating works of M. Gustave Flaubert, M. Xavier de Montepin, M. Ernest Feydeau, and others of that modern school which delights in calling a spade a spade, with the broad theories of M. Proudhon to be her political guide, and the casu-

istries of M. Renan for her Sunday reading. She read all, but liked the novels best ; and had been seen to weep over a yellow-covered volume in which an elegant marquis, all soul and black eyes, a *membre du Jockey-Club*, and altogether an adorable person, had to give satisfaction to a brute of a husband who objected to being dishonoured.

With one of these yellow-covered volumes on her lap, Miss Lexden was sitting placidly in the easiest of chairs at the open window on the afternoon when Barbara and Churchill held the conversation just narrated. She was a pleasant-looking old lady, with a fat, wrinkleless, full face, like an old child, with a shiny pink-and-white complexion, and with hair which defied you to tell whether it had been wonderfully well preserved, or admirably dyed, arranged under a becoming cap. She was dressed in a rich brown *moiré-antique* silk, and with a black-lace shawl thrown over her ample shoulders ; her fat, pudgy little hands, covered with valuable rings, were crossed over the book on her lap ; and she was just on the point of dropping off into a placid slumber, when there came a knock at the door, immediately upon which Barbara entered the room.

"Well, Barbara," said the old lady, stifling a yawn ; "is it time to dress? I've done nothing since luncheon but read this ridiculous book, and I was very nearly dropping asleep, and I've no notion of the time ; and Withers is always gadding about in this house with that steward, and never comes near me till the last moment."

"It is quite early, aunt ; scarcely six o'clock yet ; and I came up to you on purpose to have a quiet *cause* with you before you dressed. I think I have news which will keep you awake. You've not asked me of my flirtations lately."

"My dear child, why should I ask? I interested myself about Lord Hinchbrook because he was the *parti* of the season, and because to have carried him off from that odious doll, that Miss Musters, as you could easily, would have been a triumph to us both ; but you

refused. I interested myself about young Chaldecott because our families had long been intimate, and the largest property in Yorkshire is worth interesting oneself about ; but you refused. You know your own mind best, Barbara, and I know that you have too much good sense and real notion of what is right to do a foolish thing ; so I leave you to yourself, and don't worry you with any questions."

"Thanks, aunt, for your good opinion," said Barbara, playing with a sprig of scarlet geranium which she had taken from a vase on the table ; "but I shall give you no further trouble. I am going to be married."

"Sir Charles Chaldecott has written?" said the old lady, putting aside the book, and sitting upright in her chair ; "has written; and you—?" and in her anxiety Miss Lexden smiled so unguardedly that, for the first time in her life, the gold-settings of her false teeth were seen by a looker-on.

"I—we shall not hear any more of Sir Charles Chaldecott, aunt," said Barbara hesitatingly ; "no ; I am going to be married to a gentleman now staying in this house."

Miss Lexden's face fell; the gold teeth-settings disappeared from view entirely; and she shrugged her shoulders as she said, "Very well, my dear ; I feared something of the sort. If you like to settle on three thousand a year, and to take a man whose constitution is ruined by the Indian climate, I can only say—it is your affair."

Barbara bit her lips to avoid betraying a smile as she replied, "You are wrong again, aunt. Captain Lyster has never done me the honour of an offer." Then seriously, "I am going to be married to Mr. Churchill."

"*What?*" shrieked the old lady, surprised out of all decorum ; "what?" Then, after an instant's pause, "I beg your pardon, Barbara; did I not understand you to say that you were going to be married to Mr. Churchill, the—the gentleman now staying in this house?"

"You did so understand me, aunt, and it is the fact."

"Then," said Miss Lexden, in rather a low, flat key, "I'll trouble you to ring the bell for Withers. It must be time for me to dress for dinner."

Barbara looked astonished, and would have spoken; but her aunt had risen from her chair and turned her back on her, moving towards the dressing-table. So she mechanically rang the bell, and left the room.

With the result of this conversation Churchill was made acquainted as he and Barbara bent together over a large stereoscope in the drawing-room before dinner. In a few hurried words, interspersed with ejaculations of admiration at the views, uttered in a much louder tone, Barbara conveyed to her lover that their project would meet with no assistance from her aunt, even if that old lady did not actively and violently oppose it. Churchill shrugged his shoulders on hearing this, and looked somewhat serious and annoyed; but as she rose to go in to dinner, Barbara pressed his hand, and looking into her face, he saw her eyes brighten and her lip curl with an expression of triumph, and he recognised in an instant that her energy had risen at the prospect of opposition, and that her determination to have her own way had strengthened rather than lessened from her aunt's treatment.

There was an accession to the dinner-table that day in the person of Mr. Schröder, a German long resident in England, and partner in the great house of Schröder, Stutterheim, Hinterhaus, and Company, bankers and brokers, which had branches and ramifications in all the principal cities of the world. No one would have judged Gustav Schröder to have been a keen financier and a consummate master of his business from his personal appearance. He was between fifty-five and sixty years old, heavy and dull-looking, with short, stubbly, iron-gray hair, dull boiled eyes, and thin dry lips, which he was constantly sucking. He was clumsy in his movements, and very taciturn; but though he spoke little, even to Miss Townshend, by whom he was seated, he seemed to derive intense satisfaction in gazing at her with a pro-

prietorial kind of air, which nearly goaded Lyster, sitting directly opposite to them, to desperation. Upon his evidently uncomfortable state Captain Lyster was rallied with great humour by old Miss Lexden, who, however much she may have been inwardly annoyed, showed no signs of trouble. She opined that Captain Lyster must be in love; that some shepherdess on the neighbouring downs, some Brighton *poissarde*, must have captivated him, and she was delighted at it, and it would do him good; and in spite of Lyster's protestations—which, however, he soon gave up when he found he had the trouble of repeating them—the old lady launched out into a very unusual tirade on her part in favour of early marriages, of love-matches made for love's sake alone, which frequently turned out the happiest, “didn't they, Mr. Churchill?” At which question, Churchill, who was dreamily looking across the table, and thinking how artistically Barbara's head was posed on her neck, and what a lovely ear she had, stammered an inarticulate and inappropriate reply.

But when dinner was over, and the post-prandial drink finished, and the coffee consumed in the drawing-room, and the “little music” played, and the ladies had retired to rest (Barbara, in her good night to Churchill, giving one reassuring hand-pressure, and looking as saucily triumphant as before), and the men had exchanged their dress-coats for comfortable velvet lounging-jackets, and had, in most cases, dispensed with their white cravats; when Sir Marmaduke had nodded his farewell for the night, Churchill, instead of joining the party in the smoke-room, made his way to the old gentleman's quarters, and knocked at the dressing-room door. Bidden to come in, he found Sir Marmaduke in his dressing-gown and slippers, seated before a fire (for the evenings were beginning to be chilly), with a glass of cold brandy-and-water on a little table at his right hand, and the evening paper on his knee.

“Holloa!” was the old gentleman's salutation; “what's in the wind now? There must be something

the matter when a young fellow like you, instead of joining in the nonsense down-stairs, comes to hunt out an old fogey like me. What is it?"

"Business, Sir Marmaduke," commenced Churchill; "I want five minutes' business talk with you."

"God bless my soul!" growled Sir Marmaduke; "business at this time of night, and with *me*! You can't talk without something to drink, you know. Here, Gumble; another tumbler and the brandy for Mr. Churchill. Why don't you talk to Stone, my dear fellow? he manages all my business, you know"

"Yes, yes, Sir Marmaduke; but this is for you, and you alone. I came to tell you that I am going to be married."

"Ay, ay! no news to me, though you think it is. What's his name, Beresford, told us all about it. Well, well, deuced risky business; wish you well through it, and all that kind of thing. Don't congratulate you, because that's all humbug. But why specially announce it to *me*?"

"Simply because it is your due. I met the lady in this house, and the first introduction was through you. I don't know what nonsense Mr. Beresford may have been spreading, but the real fact is that I am going to be married to Barbara Lexden. Now you see my motive."

"I'm obliged to you, sir," said the old man, rising from his chair, and extending his hand; "you've acted like a gentleman, by Jove! like a gentleman and a man of honour. God bless my soul! how I recollect your father, Frank, and how like you are to him! And so you're going to marry little Barbara! not little Barbara now, though. How time flies! A good girl, sir; and a deuced fine girl, too, for the matter of that. What does her aunt say to that? She meant her for much higher game than you, young fellow. What does her aunt say? Does she know of it?—Does Miss Lexden know of it? I'll wager there'll be 'wigs upon the green,' as poor Dick Burke used to say, when she hears of it."

"Miss Lexden has heard of it, sir," said Churchill, smiling; "and I'm afraid she did not receive the news very auspiciously; but we shall endeavour to gain her consent, and if we fail—well, we must do without it. And now I won't keep you from your paper any longer. I thought it my duty to tell you, and having done so, I'll say good night."

"One minute, Frank Churchill; wait one minute. I'm a queer, useless old fellow—an old brute, I often think, for I'm not unconscious of the strange life I lead, and the odd—but, however, that's neither here nor there. Your father and I were boon companions—a wild, harum-scarum chap he was—and *such* company—and I've a regard for you, which is strengthened by your conduct to-night. My old cousin, Miss Lexden—well, she's an old lady, you know, and she meant Barbara for a marquis, at least; and then old women hate to be disappointed, you know, and she'll be savage, I've no doubt. But when you're once married, she won't be difficult to deal with, and so far as I can help you, I will. And now, God bless you, and good night; and—give Barbara a kiss for me in the morning."

About the same time, another conversation on the same great topic was going on under the same roof. Barbara had scarcely been five minutes in her room, and had been leaning thoughtfully, with her arms upon the window-sill, gazing out into the moonlit park, and utterly oblivious of Parker, who was preparing the instrument of torture for her mistress's hair, when Withers arrived with a message that Miss Lexden wished to speak to her niece. Obedient to the summons, Barbara crossed the landing, and found the old lady, resplendent in a dark-blue cashmere dressing-gown, seated before her fire. Withers dismissed *pro tem.*, Miss Lexden said:

"I'll not detain you long, Barbara. I merely wished to know whether what you said this evening about your intended marriage with Mr. Churchill was jest or earnest."

"Thorough earnest," replied Barbara, regarding her steadfastly.

"As to marriage, I mean?" asked the old lady; "not as to a temporary flirtation, which, *faute de mieux*, with a pleasant man in a dull country house, is well enough, and not likely to tell against one's interests. But as to marriage?"

"What I said before, aunt," said Barbara slowly, never dropping her eyes, "I repeat. Mr. Churchill has done me the honour to ask me to become his wife. I have consented, and I mean to keep my word."

"Very well," said Miss Lexden, drawing a long breath; "I only wished to know. You are your own mistress, and control your own actions, of course. You have made your choice, and will abide by it. I don't seek to influence you one jot. But, recollect one thing: if I were to see you with broken health, with broken spirits, ill-used, deserted, starving—as is likely enough, for I know these people—I would not lift one finger to help you, after your degradation of me. I have said it, and you know I keep my word. That is all; we will have no quarrel, and give no occasion for shoulder-shrugs and scandal. The sooner your arrangements permit of your quitting my house, the better pleased I shall be. Now, good night. Withers, I am ready now. See Miss Lexden to her room. Good night, dear."

The old lady proffered her enamelled cheek, against which Barbara laid the tip of her nose. And so the aunt and niece separated for the night.

CHAPTER XV.

MOTHER AND SON.

AT the drawing-room window of a house in Great Adullam Street, Maepelah Square, in that district of London whilom known as "Mesopotamia," a lady had been sitting from an early hour in the afternoon until now, when twilight falls upon the neighbourhood. This, I am aware, does not particularly fix the hour, because twilight falls upon the Mesopotamian neighbourhood earlier than on any other with which I am acquainted. You leave Oxford Street in a blaze of sunlight, which bit by bit decreases as you progress through the dingy streets and the dull, vast, second-rate squares, until when you enter upon the confines of Great Adullam Street you find the glory of the day departed, a yellow fog settling gloomily down, and the general aspect suicidal. At the time of which I am speaking, the twilight had been a settled thing for at least an hour,—it was approaching six o'clock. The lamps were lighted, and the inhabitants of the neighbouring houses had pulled their blinds down and settled in for the night; but still at No. 57 the lady sat in the drawing-room window, staring out into the yellow fog. The street lamp flickering on her showed her to be a woman of about sixty years old, with clean-cut regular features, intelligent but sweet expression, and with gray hair—almost white—arranged in broad bands on either side her face. Her dress was black silk, with a soft white-muslin cape pinned across her breast, and on her head she wore a plain white-muslin cap with a little crimped border. On her hands she had black-lace mittens, and she wore a few old-fashioned but valuable rings.

A glance at her would have proclaimed her a lady to the most casual observer, a woman of taste and refinement and sensibility to the physiognomist; and a further study would have shown the latter deeply-indented traces of mental anxiety and suffering.

Indeed, Eleanor Churchill's life had not been a particularly happy one. Daughter of a country clergyman near Bath, she lost both her parents before she was eighteen, and remained in the school where she was being "finished" after their death, giving her services as teacher for her board and lodging. Here she was seen and admired by Vance Churchill, who attended the school as drawing-master; a wild young fellow, full of talent, who worked (at intervals) like a horse, and whose splendid method of touching-up the pupils' drawings, so as to make them look all their own, redeemed many of his shortcomings, and caused him to be continued in favour at Minerva House. But when he fell in love with the pretty teacher, and muttered love to her as he was sharpening pencil-points, and was seen by the writing-master—an old person of seventy, who was jealous of his young *confère*—to hand her a note in a copy of the *Laws of Perspective*, and on being taxed with his crime acknowledged it and gloried in it, it became impossible for the Miss Inderwicks, as the girls called them, or the Misses Inderwick, as they called themselves, to stand it any longer. So both the delinquents were discharged; and having nothing to live upon, they at once got married, and came up to London. Once there, Vance Churchill set to work with a will: he drew on wood, he lithographed, he drew languishing heads for the music-shops, and caricatures political and social; he finished several elaborate sketches in water-colour and in oil; but he sold scarcely any thing. There was not that demand for art in those days there is now, and consequently not that chance of livelihood for its possessors; and Vance Churchill and his young wife were very near to starvation indeed, and had buried one little girl-baby, who, had luxuries been provided for her, might have lived, when

a small picture of Lady Macbeth, which had found a place in the Somerset-House Exhibition, was seen and purchased by Sir Jasper Wentworth, our old friend Sir Marmaduke's uncle and his predecessor in the baronetcy. From that time Vance Churchill's fortune was looked upon as made; for Sir Jasper, who had a nice eye for art, took him up, introduced him right and left, and got him commissions without end. Young Marmaduke, a free-spoken, jolly young man, coeval with the artist, took an immense fancy to him, and was never happy save in his society; money was, if not plentiful, always to be had,—and Eleanor Churchill was more wretched than she had ever been in the days of her direst poverty.

For though Vance Churchill could struggle against poverty, neglect, and hardship, he could not withstand ease, comparative wealth, and the attractions of society. He was eminently a "social" man; a big, jolly jovial fellow, with bright blue eyes, large brown whiskers, and a splendid set of teeth. He had capital lungs, and sang a capital song in a deep baritone voice, and he had nice feeling in his singing, which so seldom accompanies correct musical execution; but when Vance Churchill sang "Farewell, my trim-built Wherry," or "Tom Bowling," all the female portion of his audience was in tears, while the men felt husky and uncomfortable. He became the rage in a certain set of fast young men about town, and in that pleasant Upper Bohemia wherein so many literary men, artists, and actors of that day used to spend their time; not a Bohemia of taprooms and sanded floors, of long clay-pipes and spittoons and twopennyworths of gin, nor of Haymarket night-houses and drunken trulls, nor of blind-hooky and *vingt-et-un* parties in dingy chambers; but a Bohemia of green-rooms and *coulisses*, of sparkling little suppers afterwards at Vauxhall, where wit would flow as fast as the champagne, where jokes would be more telling than the hot punch, and whence the mad party would not unfrequently dash away in their carriages to breakfast at the Star and Garter at Richmond, or to drink fresh milk and eat fresh butter in a Hamp-

stead farmhouse. A Bohemia, the denizens of which always would have good clothes and fine linen on their backs, gold watches in their pockets, and guineas in their purses, let who would pay for it; and who roared with laughter at the astonishment of the world at their vagaries, increasing their eccentricities, and saying of the world as Balzac's actress said, "*Qu'importe? donne leur des grimaces pour leur argent, et vivons heureux!*"

Petted and fêted by the style of society in which he revelled, Vance Churchill had yet the grace not to attempt to force his wife to join it; indeed he had good reason for keeping her away. For the ladies liked Vance Churchill vastly, and Vance returned the compliment, and behaved just as though there were no moral and legal ties binding him to any one in particular. He loved his wife sincerely all the time, and in his quiet moments would tear his hair, and stamp upon the ground, and curse his own weakness and folly, and his treatment of that angel who sat patiently at home attending to and teaching their little boy, and who never reproached him save by her pale face and broken spirit; and then, as evening came round, Marmaduke Wentworth would call for him, or the servant would bring him a dainty little note, written in a very scrawly hand, which she would hold in the corner of her dingy apron, and which Vance would seize from her, and after reading it he would sally out, and commence his vagaries *da capo*.

Preaching before Mary Queen of Scots and her maids of honour, old John Knox is reported to have said: "Oh, how beautiful, how charming, how pleasurable would be this life, *if it would only last!*" These were Mr. Vance Churchill's sentiments, but he soon found that it would *not* last. What the writers of those ghastly impositions, bacchanalian ditties, call "wine and women," or "beauty and the bowl," don't agree with hard work; and if you go to bed at five a.m. after orgies, you will not be able to paint your pictures next day, or to write your book, or mould your clay, or study your part. It is astonishing how slow people are to believe this, and how, year after

year, we see friends and acquaintances still determined, not merely upon burning the candle at both ends, but lighting any bit of wick that may protrude in the middle, and quite astonished when they see the flame flicker and feel the whole affair about to collapse. Vance Churchill had plenty of commissions for pictures from first-rate people,—noblemen, connoisseurs, and patrons of art,—but he did not give himself the chances of painting them: his brain was never clear enough for conception, his hand never steady enough for execution; and the result was, that his financial affairs became desperate. His noble patrons never dreamed of parting with their money until the work was done—and in truth not often then; and there were in those days no middle-men, no bland picture-dealers, to advance large sums on untouched canvases; and even if there had been, they would have been far too wise to let Vance Churchill have any money on the strength of “working it out.” So the money dwindled and dwindled, and then Vance began borrowing of his friends until he found averted faces and buttoned pockets, and then he faded straight away out of his grand society, and took lodgings at Chelsea, and tried once again to work for his livelihood. He painted one picture, which showed but few traces of his old force and promise. It was plain that the mischief was done; and then Vance Churchill, after steadily drinking for four days, was found one morning with an empty laudanum-phial in his clenched fingers, and a heart-breaking letter to his wife by his side.

Then Eleanor Churchill—who, while perfectly conscious of her husband’s frailties and imperfections, had never ceased worshipping him—fairly broke down; and had she not been attended by a skilful physician, and perseveringly nursed night and day by the girl who had been “scrub” at Miss Inderwick’s school, and had left when Eleanor left to follow her fortunes, little Frank would have been motherless as well as fatherless. As it was, she recovered, and went away, as soon as she was able to move, to a little fishing-village in Devon, of which

an old friend of her father's was vicar. Her income was a mere pittance; contributions from old friends of her husband's family and her own grudgingly yielded; but her expenses were trifling, and the old parson took the boy's education under his own charge, and gave him an excellent classical groundwork. The vicar died when Frank was about fifteen, and left the whole of his little savings — some seven hundred pounds — to Eleanor Churchill, "for the furtherance of her son's education;" and then the widow carried out her long-cherished plan of sending her son to some foreign university, where, in addition to his Classics, he could perfect himself in some of the modern languages. Frank was absent at Leipzig nearly four years, during which period he paid two flying visits to England, at the second of which he was introduced to his godfather, Sir Marmaduke Wentworth, who had succeeded to the family title on his uncle's death. Frank little thought that one of Sir Marmaduke's first acts on coming into his property had been to settle two hundred a year on Mrs. Churchill for her life; he would hear of no refusal. "It is merely an act of reparation," said he; "and but a scanty one. It was my folly, my bad example, that led poor Vance astray; and I should never rest if I thought that those he left behind him were in want, while I had means." But one condition was attached to this gift, and that was that Frank should never know of it. "I recollect Vance's spirit in his best days," Marmaduke said; "and if the boy is like him, he'd fling my money at my head."

After taking his degree, Frank was fortunate enough to render himself so agreeable to young Fortinbrass, the son of the great Indian pale-ale brewer, that that young plutocrat insisted on taking him with him as half-secretary, half-bear-leader, in his tour through Europe and the East; and as they stopped at every place where there was any thing to be done, and a good many at which there was nothing to be done, and as they had the usual share of quarantine, and as Fortinbrass took ill at Smyrna and had to lay up for four months, it was full three years

before Frank returned to England. Then he determined to settle down and get to work in earnest; and after a few rebuffs and discouragements, philosophically encountered, he made his mark in the press world, and obtained constant and fairly remunerative employment. Then the house in Great Adullam Street was taken, as handy to the *Statesman* office, Frank's head-quarters, and furnished partly with the best of the Devonshire furniture, and partly with odds and ends bought cheap at sales, for the joint income was but small, and Eleanor had a wholesome horror of debt. And then the full tide of Eleanor Churchill's happiness flowed in: she had loved her husband; she had worshipped his memory in her holy of holies; she had preserved his image, and had bowed down before it; with his death vanished all his shortcomings, but his better qualities—the early affection, kindness, and chivalry—were remembered. But now that her son was with her, the old image faded and rapidly paled. Here was one uniting the excellences of his father with virtues which his father never possessed, tempering high spirits and ardent affection with earnestness, industry, and honour; no mawkish sentimentalist, no prudish Pharisee; a man of passions and impulse, yet a Christian and a gentleman, and above all—her own boy. That was the touchstone; that was the grand secret. He had his flirtations, of course; his intrigues, perhaps; but he was her son, her companion, and she was his honoured mother, but she was also his trusted friend. All his hopes and fears, all the fun and gossip of the day, were brought by him to her; he talked to her on books and art and social questions; he read to her and with her; he advised her on her own reading, and he brought home with him men of European fame and name, and introduced her to them, and made much of her before them. *If it would only last!* Beware of that, Eleanor Churchill! Some one must reign after you, and with her uprising must be your downsetting. It was ever so. Ask not why tarry the wheels of his chariot, for

the news that he brings with him will wring and torture your fond, trusting heart.

The old lady's face, which had grown somewhat worn and rigid in watching, brightened as she heard the sound of wheels in the distance, and as she saw a hansom cab come plunging and rattling over the uneven stones, to be finally pulled up with a jerk before the door.

As Frank Churchill sprang out, he looked up to the window and waved his hand. In a minute he had run up-stairs and was in his mother's arms.

"Why, my boy, how late you are!" said Mrs. Churchill, as she relaxed her embrace. "You must be famished for your dinner, my poor fellow!"

"Excursion-trains, mother, your favourite doctrine of health and change for your old *protégé* the working-man, you know, have contributed to your anxiety and my delay. We were stopped at Forest Hill for a train full of people, with drooping hats and feathers and banners and bands and general tomfoolery, who had been having a day at the Crystal Palace."

"Well, so long as you're here, and all safe, that's all the old mother cares about, Frank. Dinner, Lucy, now, at once; Mr. Frank's half-starved. Let me look at you, my boy, and see whether the trip's done you any good. Eh, you're certainly tanned, and a little stouter, Frank, I think."

"Perhaps so, mother, though I've been taking more exercise than usual too. Any news? I saw a pile of letters on the study-table as I rushed past, but I didn't stop to look at them. Any body been?"

"Mr. Harding was here yesterday, to see if you had returned from among the 'swells,' as he called them. I think he's a little envious of your going into such society; eh, Frank?"

"Not a bit of it, mother; nothing would take old George Harding beyond his own set. But he's afraid of my getting my head turned."

"No fear of that in my boy," said Mrs. Churchill somewhat gravely; "there is the difference between you

and your poor father, Frank. And now, how is Sir Marmaduke? and what sort of people were staying there? and was he kind and friendly to you? and how did you enjoy yourself?"

As Mrs. Churchill finished speaking, Lucy the old servant entered the room and announced dinner. She was a tall gaunt woman, with a hard unpleasant face, which did not soften much when Churchill, looking up, said, "Well, Lucy, back at home, once again, you see."

"Yes, I see, Master Frank," the woman replied coldly. "We've been waiting dinner until we must be faint, I should think."

"But it wasn't Mr. Frank's fault, Lucy," said Mrs. Churchill; "the train was late. Now, my boy, come; you must be starved in earnest;" and they went downstairs.

"We've not got such a dinner for you as you've been having lately, maybe," said Lucy, as she uncovered the dishes. "But you can't be always among lords and ladies, Master Frank."

"Lucy, you silly thing!" said Mrs. Churchill, half-laughing, but looking half-ashamed.

"I've not been among them at all, Lucy, for the matter of that," said Churchill good-humouredly, though his brow began to cloud.

"Well," said the woman, leisurely handing the dishes, "it's not for the want of wishing. Here we are, left at home, in the hot autumn weather; while you—"

"Lucy!" exclaimed Mrs. Churchill.

"Be good enough to leave the room," said Churchill; "this minute!" he said, bringing his hand heavily down on the table, as the woman lingered, looking towards her mistress. "Why, mother darling, what is this?" he asked, when they were alone; "that woman's tongue was always free, and her manner always familiar; but this is quite a new experience."

"It is, my child," said poor Mrs. Churchill; "I don't know how to excuse her, except that it is all done out of excess of affection for me, and—"

"That's quite enough excuse for me, mother," said Churchill, rising, and kissing her. "There, now we'll change the conversation;" and they talked merrily enough on indifferent topics throughout dinner.

When the cloth was removed, and after Frank had produced his old meerschaum, and had drawn up his chair to the newly-lighted bit of fire, he said to his mother, "I've some news to tell you, mum."

"Tell it, my boy!" said the old lady, settling her gold-rimmed glasses on her nose, and beginning to make play with a portentous piece of knitting; "what is it, Frank?"

"Well, it's news that concerns both of us," said Churchill, slowly puffing at his pipe, "but me more especially. The fact is, mum—I'm going to be married."

It had come at last! that news which she had dreaded so many years past, that news which spoke to her of separation from all she loved, which heralded to her the commencement of a new existence—had come at last! Her heart seemed to give one great bound within her breast as the words fell upon her ears, and her eyes were for an instant dimmed; then recovering herself, she smiled and said, "To be married? that is news indeed, my boy!"

"Ay, mother, my turn has come at last. I thought I had settled down into a regular old bachelor, but I believe that is just the state of mind in which one is most liable to infection. However that may be, I have caught it, and am in for it, as badly as any young lad of twenty."

Mrs. Churchill had risen from her seat, and crossed the room to Frank. Putting her hand lightly on his head, she then flung her arms round him and kissed him warmly, saying, "God bless you, my darling boy, and grant you happiness! God bless you, my son, my own son!" and she fairly broke down, and the tears coursed down her cheeks.

"Why, mum!" said Churchill, gently caressing her; "why, mum!" continued he, stroking her soft gray hair with one hand, while the other was wound round her. "You must not do this, mum. And here's a mother for

you! I declare she has never yet asked who or what the lady is!"

"That will come presently, darling; just now I am only thinking of you—thinking how different it—how, after so long—how strange—there, come now, and tell me all about it;" and with one great effort Mrs. Churchill composed herself, and sat down by her son's side to hear his story.

That story lasted far into the night. Frank told of all his hesitation; of his determination not to propose; of the accident that brought about the great result of his happiness; and of the manner in which the affair was viewed by old Miss Lexden. He then said that he and Barbara were determined upon getting married at once, and that he had come up to town principally with the view of looking out some lodgings which he could take in the neighbourhood for them to return to after their honeymoon. His mother listened patiently throughout, with her calm, earnest eyes fixed upon his face, and only now and then commenting in a low tone; but when he finished, she laid her hand on his and said quietly:

"You will bring your bride *here*, Frank, and I will go into the lodgings. Henceforth this house is yours, my boy! You are the head of our family now, and I—so long as I'm near you and can see you from time to time, what more do I want? So long as you are happy, I am happy, and—"

"But you don't imagine, mother, I'm going to turn you out, and—"

"There's no turning out in the case, my darling. Lucy and I could not occupy the house by ourselves, and we shall be much better in lodgings. Besides, we won't have any one say that you had not a house of your own to bring your wife to. I shall see her soon, Frank? Do you think she'll like me, my darling? When she knows how I love you, I am sure she will; and yet I am not certain of that. You'll come and see me often, won't you, Frank? and—oh, my boy, my own darling boy!" and she fell on his neck and wept bitterly.

CHAPTER XVI.

“FOR BETTER, FOR WORSE.”

WHEN Churchill returned to Bissett, he found that a considerable change had taken place in the aspect of affairs there. Beresford and Lyster had departed, and old Miss Lexden was on the point of starting that very afternoon, her natty boxes in their leather cases lining the hall; for the old lady was calmly implacable, and never altered one jot of her original determination. After his talk with Frank Churchill, Sir Marmaduke had determined on using his best efforts towards restoring peace, and setting affairs on an amicable footing; so the next morning, when he was closeted with Major Stone discussing various points of business, the old gentleman gradually wore round to the matter perplexing him, took Stone into his confidence, and finished by commanding the major immediately to seek a conference with Miss Lexden, to inform her of Sir Marmaduke's views, and use his best efforts to bring her at least to a compromise. The gallant warrior received the commission with a very ill grace. He hinted that to look after his friend's rents and tenants, farm and live-stock, servants and money-matters, was all well enough; but to have to colloque with a parcel of old cats who—however, since it was to be done, he supposed he must do it; and he would “tackle” the old lady at once. But the old lady carried far too many guns for this blundering half-pay Major, and before he had been in her company five minutes made him feel exceedingly sorry that he had asked for the interview. Miss Lexden received him in the pleasantest manner, talked lightly of the weather, praised in the highest terms Major Stone's admirable management

of Sir Marmaduke's estate, could not imagine how Sir Marmaduke would get on without his "other self;" and then, when Stone's flattered vanity led him to disclose the real object of his visit, Miss Lexden pulled up short, and in her most dignified and icy manner declared that "these *were* family matters, which allowed of no intervention by a third person, especially one entirely unconnected with either side, and therefore incapable of appreciating the delicacies of the position; what, for instance, would Sir Marmaduke have thought of her if she had sent Withers to enter into negotiations!" and thus having completely upset the Major, Miss Lexden summarily dismissed him.

When he returned to his principal, and gave him a full account of his treatment, the old gentleman was very wrath, and took a speedy opportunity of waiting personally upon Miss Lexden.

After exchanging ordinary civilities, their conversation was short and sharp.

"Susan! you're behaving sillily, worse than sillily, in this matter of Barbara and Frank Churchill; and I've come to tell you of it!"

"It's not the first time, Marmaduke, that you have come to me on a fool's errand."

First blood to Miss Lexden: the old man thought of the days of his courtship, when he owed but little to Susan Lexden's assistance, and winced.

"Thank you! You're kind and generous as ever! But it was not to talk of bygone times that I came here. Take my word, Susan, you're wrong in your treatment of this business."

"As how, pray?"

"You've played for a big stake with Barbara, and she won't have it! She's fallen in love, in real desperate love; no make-believe humbug, but regular love!"

Miss Lexden shrugged her shoulders, raised her eyebrows, and tattooed impatiently with her foot.

"God knows she's to be envied," said the old gentleman; "how many girls are there, do you think, who are

booked for marriage before next spring, who would give their ears to feel to their future husbands as Barbara does to hers? It's not about her I'm come to preach, it's about you. You're behaving like an idiot, Susan,—worse than an idiot,—in thus refusing your countenance to the match."

"You're growing horribly coarse in your language, Marmaduke, and unfit for me to listen to. But since you've broached the topic, hear me: I shall leave Bissett at once; and once gone, I shall never see Barbara again. I shall not give her one sixpence for her *trousseau*, or make one addition to her wardrobe. I will not allow her a penny, and I will strive to forget that I ever knew there was such a person on earth. She has grievously disappointed me, and been selfish and ungrateful; but I shall not cast her off, or do any thing melodramatic or nonsensical; I shall simply ignore her existence, and live on as though she had never been."

Sir Marmaduke retired, boiling over with rage. An hour afterwards he sent for Barbara to the library and placing a cheque for 100*l.* in her hands, told her he had arranged with Mrs. Vincent to accompany her to town and get the requisite articles for her *trousseau* at once. Her aunt was about to leave, he said; but Mrs. Vincent had promised to stop and act *chaperon*, and Miss Townshend would be bridesmaid. Let the wedding take place at once, since both the young people wished it, and let it be from Bissett. There would be no fuss, no tomfoolery; but no one should be able to say in future that there was any thing underhand or secret about her marriage, or that it was not properly countenanced by some of the family. If her aunt chose to be an old fool, that was her look-out, not his. And then the old gentleman kissed her on the forehead, and told her that while he lived she and Frank should never want a friend.

Miss Lexden left on the evening of the day on which Churchill returned, without seeing him or taking farewell of any of the household. Mr. Townshend would have liked to go too, but his daughter strongly objected,

determining to remain with Barbara ; a determination in which she was well supported by Mr. Schröder, who had taken great interest in Barbara's "love-affair" ever since it had been made public—as apparently seeing therein an excess of romance which might cast a halo over his own somewhat meagre and prosaic wooing. Mrs. Vincent, too, entered into the affair with great spirit, principally incited thereto by her hatred of old Miss Lexden, who had been particularly rude about Mr. Vincent's little gastronomical tastes ; and Sir Marmaduke seemed for a time to have eschewed his eccentricity, and to have become perfectly humanised. Of course Major Stone was in great force, rallying the lovers with much subtle humour, and looking after all the preparations for the wedding with as much interest as though he were a person principally concerned.

The day arrived, and the weather did its very noblest for the young people. The sky was cloudless, and the sun brilliant, if not warm. Barbara was in the finest health and spirits, and never looked more lovely than in her plain white silk dress and Brussels lace—the latter an old family relic. The wedding took place at the little parish-church, where three bells rang a somewhat abbreviated but merry peal, while the villagers thronged the churchyard and did proper obeisance and gratulation to a party coming from "the Grange." Afterwards there was a breakfast, at which no one save the clergyman and the house-inmates were present, where there was only one speech of four words,—“God bless them both !” from Sir Marmaduke ; and then, kisses and hand-shakings done, they departed. As Churchill shook hands with the old gentleman, the latter left an envelope in his godson's hands, which, on opening, he found to contain a bank-note for fifty pounds, with the words “For the honeymoon” in the envelope. Nor had Barbara been without her presents. On the previous evening she had received a packet containing a necklace of ivy-leaves in dead deep-coloured gold, with earrings to match, and in the case Captain Lyster's card, with “With all good wishes”

written on it; while a splendid enamel and diamond bracelet came to her as the joint gift of Mr. Schröder and Alice Townshend.

While the happy couple were honeymooning it in the north of Devon, unconsciously standing as capital models of posed figures to several artists who had lingered beyond most of their fraternity in those pleasant quarters, old Mrs. Churchill, having engaged a tolerably neat lodging not far from her old abode, devoted herself and some of her savings to the embellishment of the house in Great Adullam Street, which was newly painted outside, and revived within to the extent of new carpeting and a general polishing of the furniture. Intelligence of these triumphs had been duly conveyed in letters to Frank, who in return, thanked his mother, and sent a postscript by Barbara, who, addressing her as "her dear mother," begged her not to over-fatigue herself in their service; which little message, signed "Your affectionate daughter, B. C.," brought tears of delight into the old lady's eyes, and had the effect of causing her to redouble her exertions. At last the day for their return arrived, and the rain, which had been threatening for nearly a week past, broke through the yellow canopy of fog hanging over London, and came down heroically. It was not favourable weather in which to make one's first acquaintance with Great Adullam Street, which required a good deal of sunlight to do away with its normal ghastliness; and as the evening twilight, drear and dim, came rolling up, Eleanor Churchill, sitting at the window of her lodgings on the look-out for the cab, which must pass her door, felt her heart sink within her with a strange, indefinable sensation of dread. Her delicacy had prevented her being present on her new daughter's first arrival at her home; but she now almost regretted that she had not gone round to welcome her among her new and strange surroundings. Great Adullam Street very seldom had a cab rattling over its ill-set stones; there was a large gate at one end (as is frequently the case in the neighbourhood), where every public

vehicle was stopped, and sent by a different route, at the mandate of a very sullen gate-keeper, unless it happened to be bound to some house in the street. So that when Mrs. Churchill heard the creaking gates open, followed by the noise of wheels, she knew that her children had arrived, and looking out, saw by the lamplight Barbara's handsome face at the cab-window. "Handsome, very handsome and patrician-looking," thought the old lady; "but what a strange look of bewilderment on it!"

The cab stopped, and Churchill jumped out and handed Barbara into the house. Lucy, old Mrs. Churchill's servant, stood within the door, and gave a very grim bow as Barbara passed; the two newly-hired servants were smirking in the passage. Frank hurried past them, and led Barbara into the little dining-room. She was very tired with her journey, and at once sat down.

"Who was that horrid person, Frank, at the door,—with the strange sour look, I mean?"

"Oh, my mother's servant, old Lucy; been with her since her girlhood. She has not prepossessing manners, but she's a faithful creature. You'll make much of her, dearest."

"Nothing, I should hope; she's too horrible! What a disagreeable colour this paper is, and what a horribly prim carpet! I'll take off my things, Frank, at once, and come down to dinner; I'm rather faint."

Churchill lit a candle, and preceded her up the stairs—at the carpet on which Barbara made a despairing shrug—to the best bedroom, erst his mother's, where stood the heavy four-post bed, the old-fashioned mahogany wardrobe, the dingy pictures of sacred subjects—all the furniture just as he recollected it for years. It was rather a ghastly room, certainly; and when Frank had left her, to go down and pay the cabman and see about the luggage, she glanced nervously round, and burying her face in her hands, burst into a flood of tears.

Thus her husband found her when he returned. He at once rushed up to her, and asked her what was the

matter ; but she replied that she was a little over-fatigued, and would be better after the dinner and rest.

“That’s well,” said Frank cheerfully ; “you must not give way now, darling ; recollect you’re *at home*.”

At which words, strange though it may appear, Barbara’s sobs were redoubled.

CHAPTER XVII.

MINING OPERATIONS.

NO sooner was the Churchills' wedding safely over than all further reason for keeping on the establishment at Bissett Grange was at an end, and the party broke up at once. Sir Marmaduke went straight to Paris, and took up his quarters at Meurice's, according to his annual custom, to the disgust of Gumble, who detested all things "forring" with that pious horror always to be found in the British serving-class. The old gentleman knew Paris better perhaps than he knew London, and was thoroughly well known in the best circles of Parisian society; his eccentricity, *quelque chose bizarre*, which distinguished him from the ordinary run of English visitors, made him popular with the young people, while his perfectly polished manner to women, the unmistakable not-to-be-acquired high-breeding of the true gentleman, combined with his ready wit and biting sarcasm, both expressed in perfect French, rendered him a favourite with his coevals. To the Faubourg and its inhabitants, however, his visits were principally confined; he had never yielded allegiance to the Imperial Court, and used to speak of it and its august head in a very disparaging manner. "Gad, sir!" he would say in the smoke-room of Meurice's, after his return from the Français or from some grand reception,—“Gad, sir! I've a very low opinion of your what d'ye call him?—your Emperor! met him often when he was in England,—at Gore House, and two or three other places; always found him a silent, moody, stupid fellow—that's it! a stupid fellow, by Jove!—tries to make out that he holds his tongue to

think the more; like the monkey, you know. My belief is, that he's so deuced quiet because he's got nothing to say. And his surroundings, my dear fellow! his surroundings, awful! De Rossignol, who was a billiard-marker or a singer at a *café chantant*, or something of that kind; Oltenhaus, the financier, who is a Polish Jew, of the worst stamp; and O'Malley, the Marshal, a mere Irish adventurer! That is not the sort of stuff for Courts, sir!—the sweepings of the Boulevard theatres, the *Juden-Gasse* at Frankfort, and the long-sword, saddle, bridle, whack-fol-de-rol, and all the rest of it, of the bold dragoon! *Vieille école bonne école* is a good maxim, by Jove! They mayn't be clever; but they're gentle-people at least, and that's not saying a little for them!"

So the old gentleman growled to the little select circle round him, enjoying himself meanwhile in the highest degree. Perhaps one of the most gratifying results of his sojourn in Paris he could not have explained, though at the same time he was, however unconsciously, keenly sensible of it; it was that he had Gumble at his mercy. So desolate, so bored, so completely used up was that great man, that he looked forward to the time of his master's retiring for the night, and getting up in the morning, as the only two happy periods in his Parisian existence. All the toilet-ceremonies, before held by him in deep disgust, were now lingered over with the utmost fondness, and every scrap of gossip was brought forward in the chance of its provoking a discussion, and protracting the period when the valet should be again relegated to the company of the French and German waiters and pert ladies'-maids, who scoffed at Gumble's old-fashioned ways and stories. Of course there were other gentlemen's gentlemen installed with their masters at Maurice's; but they were all much younger than Gumble; and when their "governors" were not expected home till late, beguiled the weary hours with pleasant dances at the Salle Valentino, or such-like resorts. But Gumble was a little too old, and a great deal too insular, to enjoy these recreations. Once indeed he had been

persuaded into attending one of these public balls; but the sight of his deep white choker, straight-brushed whiskers, and solemn old mug, had such an effect on the dancers,—Jules utterly missing his great bound in the *cavalier seul*, and Eulalie failing to touch her *vis-à-vis* shoulder with her toe in the *en avant deux*,—that he was requested to confine his *tristesse* to some other place; and as he was really not amused, he willingly consented. So, after that, he remained at Meurice's, generally sitting solitary in a crowd of chattering French servants, beguiling the time sometimes by speculating how long his master would live, and what he would leave him at his death; whether a greengrocer's or a public-house would be the most profitable business to undertake with Sir Marmaduke's legacy; whether he could get any thing for the recipe of some wonderful boot-varnish which he alone possessed; sometimes by reading a shilling novel of fashionable life, or nodding dreamily over the *Times* of the previous day. One night, as he was attending his master to bed, he brought forth a special bit of news which he had reserved.

"House full here, sir," said he, as he was mixing the old gentleman's evening draught.

"Ah!" growled Sir Marmaduke. "God bless my soul, pack of people come over by the rail devilish cheap, and all that sort of thing. Poor dear old diligences kept the place clear; that was one comfort. Full, eh? Any body I know?"

"Capting Currer, from the Forring Office, come in to-night, sir; saw he had a white shammy-leather bag with him, sir—"

"Ah! Queen's messenger off to-morrow morning to Smyrna or Kamschatka, or some infernal place. Any body else?"

"Miss Lexden come, sir; but we was full here, just full; so she have gone next door to the Windsor, sir. Only Withers with her, sir; no one else. Must miss Miss Barbara, sir—Mrs. Churchill, sir—I shouldn't think, sir."

"What the devil business is it of yours? What right

have you to think about it? There now; be off! Good night."

"Bless my soul!" said the old gentleman, when he was left alone. "I'm deuced glad Susan didn't get in here, or she'd have led me a pretty life. I suppose I must call on her to-morrow morning. Deuced unpleasant talk there'll be—Barbara, and all the rest of it. Poor girl! Susan—too hard—come round at last;" and musing in this way Sir Marmaduke fell asleep.

When, in the course of the next day, he called upon Miss Lexden, he found that lady in the highest spirits. "I knew you were here, Sir Marmaduke," said she. "I've had Cabanel here;—you recollect little Cabanel? Spanish-looking little fellow with black eyes; was an attaché when the Walewskis were in London; and he saw you at the duchess's last week. You're going there to-morrow of course? How well you look! that's the climate, you know, and the style of life; so much better than in that wretched old island of ours."

"What news do you bring from that wretched old island of ours?" asked the old gentleman.

"News? none; not a scrap, positively not a scrap; nobody in town, not a soul. I didn't wait there above a day, but came through at once."

"You did not stop long enough to see the Churchills, I suppose?"

"The—eh? I beg your pardon, I did not catch the name."

"The Churchills."

"Churchills!" echoed Miss Lexden, with the greatest deliberation; "Churchills! I have not the least idea who you mean."

"Ah!" said Sir Marmaduke, through his closed teeth. "No, of course not; you don't recollect your own brother's child, even when there's no one in town. If it had been in the season, I could not have attempted to suggest any thing so horribly low; but I thought perhaps, that when there was not a soul in town, as you said, you might have thought of the girl who is of your

blood, and who has been, as it were, your daughter for ten years." And the old gentleman stamped his stick on the floor, and looked fiercely across at his cousin.

"O—h !" said Miss Lexden, perfectly calmly. "I didn't follow you at first ; now I see. It seems strange to me that a man with your knowledge of the world, Marmaduke Wentworth,—more especially with your knowledge of me, derived in times past, when you had full opportunity of making yourself acquainted with my character,—should have imagined that I should for an instant have altered in my purpose as regards my niece Barbara. What is there to induce me to swerve one atom from—"

"What ?" interrupted Sir Marmaduke ; "what ? Old age, Susan Lexden ! You and I are two old people, who ought to be thankful to have been left here so long ; and not to bear malice and all sorts of miserable hatred in our old age, more especially to our own kindred. You're vexed with Barbara, not unnaturally, as you'd set your heart upon seeing her married to a rich man ; but that's over now, and so make the best of it. Her husband's a good fellow and a gentleman ; so what more do you want ?"

"What more !" exclaimed the old lady ; "what more ! Freedom from this style of conversation ; permission to go my own way without comment or impertinent suggestion. I use the adjective advisedly ; I claim my right to visit those whom I like, to ignore those whom I dislike, without such remarks from those who I distinctly say have no right to make them. And, however old I may be, I am not yet sufficiently in my dotage to show affection, kindness, no, nor even recognition, to those who have wilfully disregarded my desires."

So Sir Marmaduke retired worsted from the conflict, and contented himself with writing a letter to Major Stone, bidding that worthy take the first opportunity of a visit to town to ascertain how Churchill and Barbara were getting on.

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Mr. Beresford, after leaving Bissett, went for a short visit to a bachelor friend with a shooting-box in Norfolk; and after enjoying some excellent sport, and nearly boring himself to death, in the company of his host and a few hard-drinking sporting squires of the neighbourhood, returned to town—to his lodgings in South Audley Street, and to his daily routine of life. He did not at all dislike London in the autumn, when he had no calls to make; when he could wear out his old clothes; could smoke in the streets at any hour without loss of dignity; could get a little quiet reading and a little quiet play-going; and need not fear the admonitory missives of duns, who concluded that all their customers were, or ought to be, out of town at that dull season. Moreover, he had not spent all of the last two hundred pounds he had borrowed, and had received his October quarter's salary; so that, on the whole, he was in very good case, and came smiling radiantly into Simmel's room on the first morning after his return. Mr. Simmel, as usual, had a pile of papers before him; but he pushed them aside at Beresford's entrance; rose up, welcomed him; and placing his back against the mantel-piece, at once entered into conversation.

"Well, Mr. Commissioner," he commenced; "so you've got back to the hive, eh? and now I suppose you mean to remain and let one of the other hard-worked members of the Board have a little rest, eh?"

"Yes," replied Beresford; "I'm a fixture now for a long time; I must take to the collar, and stick to it; but you, old fellow,—do you mean to say you've been here all this blessed time?"

"I've not moved away yet," said Simmel; "some one must do the work, you know," he added with a meaning grin.

"Yes, I know, of course; and a deuced hard grind you've had of it. But you'll go away now, I suppose?"

"No; I shall run down to Leicestershire and get a little hunting next month perhaps; that is, if I can get away; and I might take a fortnight in Paris at Christ-

mas, just to avoid the ‘God bless yours!’ and ‘Happy years!’ and other jackass congratulations, which I hate and abominate.”

“Genial creature!” said Beresford, regarding him with great complacency; “what’s the news?”

“That’s just what I should ask you,” retorted Simmel; “there’s no news here. Sir Hickory has been to the Lakes, and ‘my lady’ was much pleased with Ullswater; which is more, I should think, than Ullswater was with ‘my lady,’ always supposing Ullswater to have any taste. Old Peck has slept as much as usual; but has not devoted as much time as he generally does to his get-up, and has consequently been rather red and rusty about his beard. O’Scanlon has been dying for your return, that he may get away; and the men in the Office are just the same as ever. Oh, by the way, I see that marriage has come off?”

“Which marriage?”

“That man Churchill, who was staying with you at old Wentworth’s, has married that dashing girl—what was her name?—Lexden!”

“Yes; and the *other* marriage has come off. Old Schröder is one flesh now with Miss Townshend; that’s a nice thing to think of, isn’t it?”

“Ay, I heard of that too; saw it in the paper of course; but beyond that, one of the young fellows here, Pringle, had cards; he’s a connexion, or something of the sort.”

“Yes; they’ve taken a thundering big house in Saxe-Coburg Square,—in the new South-Kensington district, you know,—and are coming out heavily. There’s a dinner there on Thursday, to which I’m asked; and a reception afterwards. It’s a bad time of year; but there *may* be some new fillies trotted out, you know.”

“Ah! you’ve done nothing more in that matter, I suppose? no one on hand just now! no combination of money and beauty, as Jack Palmer says, when he rides with Schwarzschild into the City?”

“None! I’ve had no chance; but I should think

this wouldn't be a bad opening. They are a tremendously well-tinned set at Schröder's ; and he's safe to ask no women who are not enormously ingotted. With such girls, unaccustomed to anything but what was Paddington and is now Tyburnia, one might have a chance, for they've seen nothing decent yet, you know. Your stock-broking gent is a hopeless beast !" And Mr. Beresford shrugged his shoulders, and then looked down at his feet, as though Capel Court lay beneath them.

"You're going to the dinner?" asked Simnel.

"Going, my dear fellow ! if you had been staying for the last month, as I have, with Jim Coverdale, you wouldn't ask the question. No better fellow than Jim breathes, and there's always capital sport to be got at his place ; but the cooking is something indescribably atrocious. One always feels inclined, when he asks you what you'd like for dinner, to use the old *mot*, and say, '*Chez vous, monsieur, on mange, mais on ne dîne pas.*' After a month's experience of Coverdale's cook, I am looking forward with eager anticipation to the performances of such an artist as Schröder will probably employ."

"I should think," said Mr. Simnel, after a minute's pause—"I should think it probable that Mr. Townshend will be there."

"First dinner after his daughter's marriage," said Beresford. "Duty, by Jove ! Of course he will."

"If he is there, I want you to do me a favour," said Simnel, quietly.

"And that is—?" asked Beresford, in whose ears the word 'favour' always rang with a peculiar knell.

"A very slight one, and involving very little trouble to you ; else, you may take your oath, I know you too well to expect you'd grant it," said Simnel, with some asperity. "No ! I merely want you, in the course of conversation, and when you have fully secured Mr. Townshend's attention, to introduce, no matter how, the name of a firm—Pigott and Wells."

"Pigott and Wells !" repeated Beresford, mechanically.

"Pigott and Wells. Should he ask you any thing further, you will remember that it is the name of a cotton firm in Combeardingham ; and take care that it fits into your story. That's all !"

"It won't get me into any row, will it ?" asked the cautious commissioner ; "you're such a tremendously sly old *diplomate*, such an infernal old Machiavel, that I am always afraid of your getting me into a mess."

"Sweet innocent ! you need not fear. There's no harm in the name. Of course, it depends upon yourself how you bring it in."

And Mr. Beresford, with a vivid recollection of owing eight hundred pounds to Mr. Simmel, undertook the commission.

About the same time Mr. Schröder's domestic arrangements were being discussed under the same roof, in No. 120.

"What are you going to do on Thursday night, Jim?" asked Mr. Pringle of Mr. Prescott.

"Nothing," said Mr. Prescott.

"Then don't," said Mr. Pringle. "It don't answer and it don't pay. I've got a card for a party in Saxe-Coburg Square, and I'll take you if you like to come."

"But I don't like to come. I'm sick of all your parties, with the same grinning and bowing nonsense, the same bosh talked, the same wretched routine from first to last. Who are the people?"

"Now, what a duffer you are !" said Mr. Pringle ; "first you declaim in the strongest virtuous indignation against all parties, and then you ask who the people are ! Well ; they are connexions of mine. Old Townshend, my godfather, who's an old beast, and who never gave me any thing except a tip of half-a-crown once when I was going to school, has married his daughter—deuced pretty girl she is too—to a no-end rich City party—Schröder by name. And Mrs. Schröder is 'at home' on Thursday evening, 'small and early ;' and I've got a card, and can take you. There's a dinner-party first, I hear, but I'm not asked to that."

“What a pity!” said Prescott; “your true philosopher only goes to dinners. Balls and receptions are well enough when one is very young; but they soon pall. There is in them an insincere glitter, a spurious charm, which—”

“Yes, thank ye,” interrupted Mr. Pringle; “for which see *Pelham passim*, or the collected works of the late Lord Byron. Much obliged; but I subscribe to Mudie’s; and would sooner read the sentiments in the original authors. What I want to know is, whether you’ll come?”

“No, then.”

“Yes, you will. I know you, you old idiot, and all the reason for your moping,—as though that would advance the cause one bit. Yes, you will. We’ll dine at Simpson’s; have a quiet weed in my chambers; dress there; and go into the vortex together.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SCHRÖDERS AT HOME.

MR. BERESFORD was thoroughly well-informed when he announced Miss Townshend's marriage with M. Gustav Schröder. That event took place almost immediately after the break-up of the party at Bissett Grange, and Sir Marmaduke attended it on his way through to Paris. The wedding was a very grand affair, and created quite a sensation in the dead time of the year. A bishop, who in his private capacity held some land which he had sold to a railway company numbering Mr. Townshend among its directors, was entrapped for the ceremony, which, of course, took place at St. George's, Hanover Square. There was such a gathering of carriages, and such a champing and stamping of horses in George Street, that two men who were sleeping at Limmer's, on their way through town, were actually induced to shake off dull sloth so early as eleven A.M., and to peer out of the window at the cavalcade; satisfying themselves with a very short glance, however, and returning to their couches again with great alacrity. Very great magnates in the banking world, the brokering world, the colonial-export world, and the shipping world, were present; as were M. Heinrich Schröder, representative of the house at Frankfort, a bent shrivelled old gentleman, with marked Jewish profile; thin hands always plucking at his thin lips, and a very small knowledge of the English language;—M. Louis Schröder, who represented the house at Paris, a man of forty, short, stout, genial, and jolly; speaking all languages with equal ease; with a keen eye for making money, but enjoying nothing better than spending it;

drinking very little, but fond of high-living and high-play; and showing general sensuality in his thick scarlet lips and short pudgy hands; more Schröders, male and female, from Hamburg, from Mainz, from Florence; and one—very much burnt up—who had just returned from losing his liver, and gaining his fortune at Ceylon. Mr. Townshend contributed the eminent personages in City firms above mentioned, but none of his family were present; and it was remarked by some of the guests, that none of his family had ever been seen by any body,—any body meaning, of course, any body in their society; but, owing to its being the dull season of the year, Miss Townshend's list was not as brilliant as it might have been. For instance, ever since as a child she married her doll to a resplendent individual in a soft scarlet-cloth coat, a cocked hat, and a pair of linen trousers (supposed to be of the male sex, but really another doll in disguise, as proved by the lump of painted hair projecting behind), she had always intended having eight bridesmaids; but Clara Hamilton and Kate Brandon were away with their people, and in their places she had asked the Melville girls, to whom, as she afterwards found, her trump card, her prettiest bridesmaid Carry Seaward, did not speak. So that the cards had all to be shuffled again, and eventually she got four very pretty attendants to the altar. Barbara and her husband were away honeymooning; and she didn't like to ask Captain Lyster, having a perfect recollection of that morning in the library at Bissett, and thinking that his presence on such an occasion would probably render them both extremely uncomfortable.

But altogether the wedding went off with success; for the bishop was not only impressively solemn during the ceremony, but was pleasantly jocose afterwards, cracked tepid little jokes with infinite gusto; and a tepid jokelet from a bishop is worth more than a brilliant *mot* from a professional wit. And the company, though not very brilliant in intellect, was quite brilliant enough to laugh when a bishop said a good thing; and every body was very well dressed; and the wedding presents, duly set

out on a side-table, made a splendid show. The Schröders were to the fore in the matter of wedding presents; the City magnates of the Townshend connexion did pretty well, so far as silver tea-services, and wine-coolers, and ice-pails, and fish knives and forks, and splendidly-carved ivory tankards with massive silver covers, were concerned, and in all the usual wedding-gift nonsense of butter-dish and card-bowl; but the Schröders gave diamond-necklaces and sets of turquoises and opals in old-fashioned filigree settings, and tiny watches from Leroy's, costing 3000 francs, and Barbedienne's rarest bronzes, and the choicest carvings from the Frankfort Zeil. Mr. Schröder, too, had taken his bride elect, two days before the marriage, to Long Acre, and shown her the neat little single brougham, and the elegant open carriage; and then had driven on to Rice's, and had had trotted out the fast trotters and the elegant steppers which had been reserved for them. And Alice Townshend thought of all these things as she stood at the altar beside the elderly gentleman with the small eyes and the stubbly gray hair; and the shudder which passed through her, as she solemnly vowed to honour and obey him, was a little mitigated by the recollection of his wealth, and her consequent future position.

The honeymoon was spent partly at Brussels, partly at Paris, and then the newly-married couple came home to their house in Saxe-Coburg Square. Fifteen years ago, just before the first Great Exhibition (*the* Great Exhibition! we who had *gelebt und geliebt* before '51 know how poor the other one was in comparison to it!), the tract of land whereon Saxe-Coburg, Gotha, Coleraine, and Dilkington Squares, Adalbert Crescent, and Guelph Place now stand, was known as Grunter's Grounds, and was tenanted by an honest market-gardener, who found a very remunerative market in Covent Garden for his cabbage cultivation. But Hodder, the great builder, marked the army of luxury marching rapidly west; and knowing that quarters must be found for it, saw in Grunter's Grounds the exact place for the erection of those squares, crescents, terraces, and places, of which his architect, Palladio Hicks,

had so elaborately shown the elevation on paper, but had erected so few. Mr. Hodder discovered that the nurseryman was in the last eighteen months of his lease, and that Grunter's Grounds belonged to a charity, the trustees of which were always quarreling among themselves. This was enough for Hodder; he soon wormed his way into the confidence of some of the trustees; and eventually succeeded in getting the renewal of the lease refused to the market-gardener, and the ground made over to him, on building lease, at a very cheap rate. Now do you wonder why Mrs. Hodder drives one of the most stylish equipages in the Park; or why, in her amateur theatricals, she manages to get hold of all that extraordinary histrionic genius, which, by an odd concurrence of events, always accompanies the possession of a clerkship in the Treasury? That was a splendid speculation for Mr. Hodder. There are thirty-six houses in Saxe-Coburg Square, for instance; and each of them lets at 320*l.* a-year. They are all, as Mr. Thackeray said of the Pyramids, "very big," and very ugly; great gaunt stuccoed erections, bow-windowed, plate-glassed, and porticoed after the usual prevalent pattern, with a small square courtyard looking into a mews behind, and Mr. Swiveller's prospect, "a delightful view of—over the way," in front. But they let wonderfully; it is the thing to live in that quarter; and hangers-on to the selva of fashion, clerks in public offices, who have married into aristocratic poor families, and suchlike, will be found bargaining for a ghastly little hole in Adalbert Crescent or Guelph Place, when they could get a capital roomy house at Highgate or Hampstead, with a big garden, in which their "young barbarians" could be "all at play" from morning till night, for far less money. Mr. Schröder's house was furnished very expensively, and, considering all had been left to the upholsterer, in not bad taste. The dining-room was in light oak, carved high-backed chairs in green morocco; a large massive round-table in the centre, with half-a-dozen swinging moderator-lamps over it; Wardour-Street Rubenses and apocryphal ancestors on the walls. Behind

this the library in dark oak, splendid writing-table, quaint old carved Davenport desk from a Carmelite monastery; wonderful collection of books, the result of the blending of two library sales at Hodgson's,—one the gathering of a bibliomaniacal *virtuoso*, the other of a sporting nobleman,—and before-letter proofs, after Landseer. The drawing-rooms I should utterly fail in endeavouring to describe, so content myself by remarking that they were halls of dazzling light,—allowed by their worst enemies, the critics, to be “delicious;” by their most captious, to be “effective,”—splendidly furnished, and opening on to conservatories and boudoirs and canvas-covered balconies.

Mr. Schröder was not the man to hide his candle under a bushel; nor, having spent a vast amount of money on his house and its decorations, to keep them solely for the contemplation of himself and his wife: so it was at his suggestion that the dinner-party and reception were organised. Mrs. Schröder at once gave her acquiescence; indeed, just at this period of her life, she was in too dazed a state to do any thing more than follow suit. She knew her father to be wealthy, and always had lived in good style; but she also knew that her parent was a great tyrant—one of those “stern” persons so popular in novels; and she had had many visions of resisting him; of flying from his roof with some young lover not overburdened with riches; of love in a cottage, and other maniacal ideas of the same description; and now she found that the time had come and passed; that she had not resisted at all; and that she was settled down with a gray-headed, elderly husband, who was one of the richest men in London. It was not her childhood's dream, perhaps; but it was by no means uncomfortable; and Mrs. Schröder wisely determined to accept the riches, and to forget the grayness of the head; and went in for the dinner-party with spirit.

Husband and wife furnished about an equal complement of friends to the banquet, which was very splendid, but at first rather dull. Old Heinrich Schröder, who

had not yet returned to Frankfort, was present; and as he spoke scarcely any English, he did not enliven the conversation; which, however, was often polyglot. The magnates from the City and their wives ate a good deal, and talked very little; while some of the younger and more aristocratic people brought in by Mrs. Schröder were silent as becomes "swells," and only occasionally worked eyebrow or shoulder telegraphs to each other, in silent wonder at, and depreciation of, their neighbours. Mr. Beresford began to be awfully bored, and tried topic after topic without meeting with the least success. At last, however, he seemed to have stumbled on one that awoke a certain amount of general interest.

"Seen your newly-elected brother-director of the Terra-del-Fuego Company yet, Mr. Schröder?" he asked.

"Colonel Levison?" said Mr. Schröder; "no, not yet; we've had no board-day since his election."

"Man of mark, sir," said an old gentleman, who had painted his chin and shirt-front with turtle-soup.

"What Levison is it, Beresford?" asked Captain Lyster, who was seated near Mrs. Schröder.

"Jack Levison; you know him. Wonderful life he's had!"

"Has he?" said Mrs. Schröder, on whom the dulness had settled like a pall. "Oh, do tell us about it, Mr. Beresford; that is, if you may."

"Oh, yes, I may," laughed Beresford; "though it's nothing much to tell. Jack was in the 9th, and came into five thousand pounds at his father's death; sold out; speculated in cotton, and made it twenty; speculated in hides, and lost every sixpence. Went out to Australia on the first discovery of gold; was a boot-black in Melbourne; actually had a stand and brushed boots, you know; afterwards was cad to the Ballarat omnibus; fact, give you my word! At last got up to the diggings; worked with varying luck, until at last turned up monster nugget, and hit upon a splendid vein; stuck to it quietly, and made a fortune. Realised; came back to England, and has doubled it. Curious life, isn't it?"

"How very odd!" said Mrs. Schröder, trying to extract a remark from a very gorgeous lady on her right; "fancy, blacking boots!"

"And what do you call 'em to a bus?" said the lady, who, though gorgeous, was Clapham-born, and still possessed her native dialect.

"Must be clayver man," hazarded a tall, thin gentleman, a light of the Draft and Docket Office, who was very short-sighted, and perpetually kept in his eye a glass, with which he endeavoured to focus somebody into conversation; hitherto hopelessly.

"Oh, yes," said his neighbour, a bald man, with cinnamon whiskers, whose life was passed in saying the wrong thing in the wrong place—"oh, yes; but don't you know he's Boswell Levison's brother. He's a Jew!"

Every body looked involuntarily at old Heinrich Schröder, about whose origin there could be no doubt, and who had that face which you may see repeated by hundreds in the Frankfort Juden-Gasse.

"Ha! ha!" said the old gentleman, catching the last word, and finding himself the centre of attraction; "was Chew! ya, zo; Chew ist goot."

Mr. Schröder turned a dull lead colour, and a general awe-struck silence fell upon the company, which was broken by Beresford, who, again coming to the rescue, said:

"You knew Levison, Monkhouse? We stayed together in his uncle's house two years ago."

The man with the eye-glass made a vain attempt to focus Beresford, and said, "Did we?"

"Yes, of course we did. You recollect, at Macarum's, near Elgin?"

Mr. Monkhouse dropped his glass from his eye, and looked up to the ceiling for inspiration; then, re-fixing it, said, "Oh, ah! Elgin! I know!—where the marble comes from?"

The Levison subject now being evidently exhausted, and the conversation becoming hopelessly idiotic, Captain Lyster strikes in at a tangent, and asks Mrs. Schröder

whether she has seen any thing recently of her friend, Mrs. Churchill,—Miss Lexden that was.

Mrs. Schröder replies in the negative, adding that she had called upon Barbara “in, oh, such a strange street!” but had not found her at home: the Churchills had been asked to dine there that day, but had declined on account of Mr. Churchill’s engagements. It was, however, probable that they might come in the evening. Hearing the name of Churchill mentioned, Mr. Beresford chimes in.

“Ah, by the way, the Churchills! friends of yours, Mrs. Schröder? How are they getting on? Love-match, and all that kind of thing, hey? Clever man, Churchill; but should have kept to his own set; married the daughter of his printer or publisher, or some fellow of that sort; not taken away one of our stars.”

“What do you mean by his own set, Mr. Beresford?” said Lyster, rousing himself. “Mr. Churchill, I take it, is a gentleman in every sense of the word. I don’t know whom you have been accustomed to associate with, but I never saw a better-bred man.”

Mr. Beresford pauses for a moment, startled at the attack; then a smile passes over his face as he says, “I didn’t impugn your friend’s breeding, Captain Lyster; but I suppose even such a Corydon as you would allow the folly of a love-match with no money on either side?”

It is probable that Captain Lyster might have replied, even seeing, clearly as he did, that the tendency of the conversation was towards an argument in which he would have to exert himself; but the cinnamon-whiskered man, who had been waiting for an opportunity of speaking, now saw his chance, and burst forth—“Love-match!” said he; “no money on either side! What then? Do you imagine that two people, young, attached to each other, who risk a—a—what d’ye call um?—fight in the great battle of life”—looking round and repeating “in the great battle of life—are not much happier than those who make, what you may call, sordid matches? Thus, for the sake of argument, an elderly man marries a young

girl; nothing in common between them: she simply married for position, or to oblige her parents; and he—well, I think we know the contemptible figure he cuts; a case of buying and selling, as you would say in the City, eh, Schröder?” and the cinnamon-coloured man, who was great at a debating-society, looked in triumph at his host.

Mr. Schröder, more leaden-coloured than ever, said, “Certainly.” Mrs. Schröder, who had been looking down at the table, and playing with her dessert-knife, rose with the rest of the ladies, and left the room. After their departure, the West-end section, including Beresford, Lyster, and Monkhouse, seemed to get silent and abstracted; while Mr. Schröder’s particular friends from the City, the bank-directors and public-company men, re-invigorated themselves with port, and discussed the politics of Threadneedle Street and the chances of change in the discount rate in hoarse whispers. Solemn dullness fell upon the West-end division: Lyster dropped into a semi-dose; Mr. Monkhouse tried to focus the talkers one by one, but failing, fell to polishing his eyeglass and admiring his nails; the cinnamon-whiskered man cut into the conversation once in the wrong place, and, having plainly showed himself to be an idiot, was promptly extinguished; and Beresford fell into a dreamy state, in which his liabilities ranged themselves in horrible array before him, and he went into wild speculations as to how they might be met. While in this state, he became conscious of old Mr. Townshend’s voice, laying down the law, in most imperative style, on matters of finance, and suddenly he remembered his promise to Simnel. He waited for his opportunity when Mr. Townshend ceased for an instant, and then said: “My dear Mr. Schröder, you can’t tell how horrible it is for us impecunious people to listen to this tremendously ingotted talk. We look upon you as a dozen Sinbad the Sailors, each having found his own peculiar treasure in the Valley of Diamonds. Ah! if it were only given to me to fathom the secret of money-making!”

The City section were pleased at this concession, and took the remarks as complimentary. Mr. Schröder smiled, and said sententiously: "Business has its cares as well as its pleasures." Mr. Townshend nodded his head, saying, "You gentlemen despise our prosaic ways and business routine; with you—"

"Business routine!" exclaimed Beresford. "Why, you make a fortune by the arrival of a telegram, by the nod of a cabinet-minister's head. I'm not so ignorant of these mercantile matters as you may fancy. When I was in the habit of staying with my intimate friend Pigott, of the firm of Pigott and Wells—"

"What name did you say?" asked Mr. Townshend, with a blanched face.

"Pigott and Wells," repeated Beresford slowly, looking at him stedfastly; "merchants of Combeardingham. Do you know the firm?"

"No, not at all. That is—I—" and Mr. Townshend's teeth chattered as he gulped down a bumper of port and cowered in his chair, as a tremendous knock, reverberating through the house, announced the arrival of the first guests for the reception.

The reception. *Item*, Herr Klavierspieler, the celebrated *pianiste*, who was so full of soul, and so mysterious, and so thin, and so long-haired, and so silent. All sorts of stories afloat about Herr Klavierspieler,—that he communed with spirits; that he was a ghoul; that he was consuming away under an unrequited passion for an Austrian countess of excessive haughtiness; whereas in real truth he was the son of a saddler in the Breite Strasse of Dresden, and his liver was deranged, perhaps by his eating five heavy meals a day, and, save when he was playing in public, never being without a pipe in his mouth. *Item*, M. Bloffski, the Pole, the violincellist of the world, a fat man in spectacles, who perspired a great deal, breathed through his nose, had a red-cotton pocket-handkerchief, and played his instrument divinely. *Item*, Mr. Schrink, musical critic of the *Statesman* newspaper,

a little man with a hump-back and a frightfully sensitive ear; a little man who would cower and shrink under false notes, and stamp and growl under bad singing; a little man whom every one hated, and who did not particularly like himself. *Item*, Fräulein Wünster, one of those German young ladies who, ever since Jenny Lind's success, have been imported into England under the firm idea that they were "going to do it," and who, having filled up gaps in the Hanover Square and St. James's Hall concerts, have returned to *Vaterland* without having made the smallest mark. Mr. Dabb, fashionable artist, whose portrait of Mr. Schröder decorated the walls, was there; as was Mr. Fleem, the author of *Fashion and Satire*—a young gentleman who, for a cynic, seemed on remarkably good terms with himself and his fellow-creatures. Mr. Pringle and Mr. Prescott arrived together; and just after the gentlemen came up from the dining-room, Mr. and Mrs. Churchill were announced.

If Mrs. Churchill had been the Empress of Austria or the Queen of the Cannibal Islands, she could not have entered the room more haughtily, or created a greater effect. She was dressed in a plain dark-gray silk, with a bunch of scarlet geraniums in her hair, and a black-lace shawl over her shoulders. Her little head was erect, her delicate nostrils distended, and her eye seemed to challenge any unpleasant remark. Frank Churchill was, as usual, quiet and sedate; but it was evident he marked the impression which his wife made, and was pleased thereby. Was he pleased with the expression of her face, as he marked it contracted for an instant, though immediately afterwards the features resumed their calm statuesque immobility? Was he pleased with the tone of her voice, which became a little hard and metallic, instead of that soft whispering which he knew as hers? Barbara's trial was on her at that instant: she had returned to that society in which she had all her life lived; those luxuries, which had been in daily use, were around her, after she had been for weeks absent from them; the mere size of the rooms, the lighting, the perfume, the presence of

guests,—all seemed to render the events of the past months as a dream; and she had to bring her presence of mind into play to argue with herself.

Mrs. Schröder rushed up to her at once; no doubt of the *empressement* of her manner! affection a little too palpable, as Barbara thought.

“Oh, Barbara darling! so glad you’re come! I thought you’d disappointed us. How late you are!”

“Frank was detained; as I expected, Alice; make him explain himself.”

“No occasion for that, I hope, Mrs. Schröder,” said Churchill; “the slaves of the lamp, you know!”

“Oh, there! that horrible business! your constant excuse; you’re all alike. Gustav! Gustav! here’s Mr. Churchill excusing himself from being late, and pleads business; take him away, and discuss the wretched subject together. I want to talk to Barbara,—a long talk. No, Gustav! I don’t care what you say about my duties as hostess: I *will* talk to my old friend!” So Schröder and Churchill went off, and Alice and Barbara seated themselves in a far window.

“Now, Barbara dear, tell me every thing. I needn’t ask you if you’re happy; that’s a matter of course. Do you like your house? Is the boudoir in pale-green silk, as we always said we’d have it? Mine’s in rose-colour; but that’s Gustav’s taste; I always liked your notion best.”

“My boudoir, Alice? you forget.”

“Oh, so I do. How ridiculous! But look here, Barbara darling; you’ll come out for a drive with me whenever I fetch you?”

“Oh, thanks, Alice; I’m too far out of your way to be fetched often.”

“Not a bit, Barbara; what else have the horses to do? though it *is* a difficult place to find out. Edwards—the coachman, I mean—had never heard of it, though he knows all sorts of short cuts; and we had to ask our way perpetually.”

Barbara had something on the tip of her tongue, but

it was never framed into words. She contented herself with saying, "the situation is handy for my husband, you know. I should not like the thought that he had far to come late at night."

"Oh! is he ever out late at night? How dreadful! how dull you must be! how wretched for you! I should make my maid sit up and read me to sleep."

"There has been no need for any such violent measures at present," said Barbara, with a slight smile. "Frank has managed to do his work at home, hitherto; but of course there may be occasions when he will be obliged to be out."

"You must come to us then. Promise! won't you, Barbara dear? You'll like Mr. Schröder; at least I think you will. He's very quiet; but so kind-hearted and thoughtful. Oh, Captain Lyster! how you startled me!"

"Very sorry, Mrs. Schröder," drawled the Captain, creeping leisurely towards them; "wouldn't have put you out for the world; but this is scarcely fair, you know; two ladies monopolising each other when we're dying to talk to them; and we're left to listen to that horrible hirsute wretch who's thumping the piano."

"Klavierspieler a horrible wretch! Did you hear that, Barbara? Well, Captain Lyster, I won't monopolise Mrs. Churchill any more, and you shall have a chat with her;" and Mrs. Schröder walked off, laughing. Barbara had been looking at Mr. Schröder, who was standing in the doorway talking with Frank Churchill; and had noticed his face fall as Lyster approached them. When Mrs. Schröder moved away, her husband seemed relieved.

Captain Lyster sat down by Barbara, and talked long, and for him earnestly. She saw at once that he wanted to be numbered among her friends; and in a score of little delicate sentences he conveyed to her his appreciation of her conduct in marrying a man whom she loved, in spite of the opposition of her friends, his respect for her husband's character and talents, and his desire to serve them. Then he turned the conversation upon Mrs.

Schröder; and Barbara noticed that his manner changed; that he hesitated, and kept his eyes down, as he wondered whether she were happy; whether she loved her husband; whether it had really been her duty to obey her father's will, and not consult her own inclinations, as people said had been the case. For the first time a light broke upon Barbara, and she knew Captain Lyster's story as plainly as if he had told it to her in so many words. Following his glance as he stopped speaking, she saw that it rested on Alice Schröder, to whom Mr. Beresford was now talking, bending over her chair with great apparent devotion; and looking from them to Mr. Schröder, Barbara remarked that the gloom had returned to his face, while Frank Churchill himself looked somewhat annoyed.

It was not without a very great deal of trouble that Mr. Pringle had induced his friend Prescott to accompany him to Saxe-Coburg Square. Even after that gentleman had given a reluctant consent he withdrew it, and on the very morning of the reception Mr. Pringle was not aware whether or not he should have to go alone. For Mr. Prescott was very much in love with Kate Mellon still: that interview in the Park had by no means had the effect of curing him of his passion; although, being a sensible young fellow, he saw that there was not the slightest use in giving way to it.

"He's a thoroughly changed buffer, is Jim, sir!" Mr. Pringle would remark of him; "he used to be the cheeriest of birds; always good for going out some where, and no end of fun; always in tip-top spirits, and the best chap out. But now he sits in his chambers, and smokes his pipe, and grizzles himself to death, pretty near; wishing he'd got more money, and all sorts of things. That won't do, you know! He must be picked up and trotted out; and the man for that line of business is yours truly." In pursuance of which determination Mr. Pringle opened a system of attack on his friend, and in the first place insisted that they should go together to Mr. Schröder's reception. Even at the last, when Prescott gave in his

final consent, it was under strong protest. "I shall be dreary, old boy; and you'll be sorry you took me. You know I'm not very good company just now, George. I've not got over—"

"All right; I know. 'Tell me, my heart, can this be?' &c. But we'll have some dinner at Simpson's, and a bottle of old port; and that'll set you up, and make you see life under a different aspect, as they say in novels."

The dinner was very good; and finding his friend still silent and low-spirited, Mr. Pringle exerted himself to rouse him. He was very well known at the dining-rooms, and called the waiters by their Christian names, and asked after their families, and little events in their private lives.

Mr. Prescott could not help laughing at the absurdities perpetrated by his friend, and gradually his spirits revived. After dinner they went to Mr. Pringle's chambers, and smoked and had some hot whisky-and-water, which, coming after the port-wine, had a very hilarious effect upon Mr. Pringle, who then wanted to "go out some where," and not to go to the Schröders at all; but Mr. Prescott overruling this, they dressed and went. Mr. Pringle—and especially Mr. Pringle after half a bottle of port-wine and a couple of tumblers of whisky-punch—was a trying person to go about with, and Prescott had to call him to order several times. When they arrived at the house, and were asked their names, he gave them as the Duke of Wellington and Mr. Babbage; and on the servant's being about gravely to repeat them, he stopped him, saying they did not wish their names announced, as they were detectives come on very private business. On the staircase he feigned a wild terror at the powdered heads of the footmen; asked "how they came so white;" by nature or not? and altogether so behaved himself, that Mr. Prescott declared he would not enter the room with him.

Once in the room, Mr. Pringle toned down visibly, and conducted himself like an ordinary mortal. He was

very friendly with Alice Schröder, and expressed poignant regret at Mr. Townshend's sudden indisposition (for that worthy gentleman declined to come upstairs after dinner; Beresford's mention of Pigott and Wells had been too much for him), though secretly Mr. Pringle was pleased at missing his godfather, whom he was accustomed to regard as the essence of sternness; and he was introduced to Churchill, of whom he spoke the next day at the office as a "deuced clever fellow, a literary bird;" and he listened for a few minutes to Klavierspieler's pianoforte-fireworks; and then went down and got some refreshment. He endeavoured to induce Mr. Prescott to accompany him; but that gentleman not merely absolutely declined, but addressed his friend in strong words of warning, and declared that as for himself he was thoroughly happy where he was.

Indeed, once more in society, surrounded by well-looking, well-dressed people, listening to music and conversation in a splendidly-appointed house, Mr. Prescott began to think to himself that the solitary pipe-smokings in dreary chambers, the shutting himself away from the world, and giving himself up to melancholy, was rather a mistake. Of course the grand cause of it all remained unaltered,—he never could get over his passion, he never would give up thinking of Kate,—and just then he started as he heard a light, musical, girlish voice behind him say, "*It is James Prescott!*" He turned rapidly round, and saw two or three people standing by him; one of whom, a very pretty, fresh-coloured buxom girl, stepped forward, laughed as he made a rather distant bow, and said, "You don't recollect me! Oh, what a horridly bad compliment!"

"It is excessively absurd, to be sure, on my part, I know. I cannot, by Jove! Emily Murray!" Prescott burst out as the face recurred to his memory.

"Emily Murray, of course!" said the young lady, still laughing; "Why, what ages since we've met! not since you left Havering; and how's the dear Vicar and the girls? which of them are married? I should so like to

see them; and you—you're in some Government Office we heard; which is it? and—”

“I must come to Mr. Prescott's rescue, Emily, if you'll introduce me. You've stunned him with questions,” said an elderly lady standing by.

“Oh, aunt, how can you say so! James—Mr. Prescott,—I don't know which I ought to say; but I always used to say James,—this is my aunt, Mrs. Wilmslow, with whom we're staying. I say we, for papa is in town; but his gout was threatening; so he wouldn't come to-night.”

“My brother will be very pleased to see you, though, Mr. Prescott,” said Mrs. Wilmslow; “I know he has the kindest recollection of your father at Havering. Will you come and lunch with us to-morrow?”

Mr. Prescott accepted with thanks, and Mrs. Wilmslow moved back to her party; but Emily Murray stayed behind, and they had a very long conversation; during which he settled not merely that he would lunch in Portland Place on the next day, but that he would afterwards accompany Miss Murray and some of her friends in their subsequent ride. As Miss Murray departed with her friends, Mr. Pringle came up and apologised for having left his friend so much alone. “Very sorry, old fellow, but I got into an argument with an old German buffer downstairs. Very good fellow, but spoke very shy English. Told me he was nearly eighty years old; and that he accounted for his good health by having been always in the habit of taking a walk past dinner. Took me full ten minutes to find out he meant *after* dinner. But I say, old fellow, I'm really sorry; you must have had a very slow evening.”

“On the contrary,” said Mr. Prescott, “I've enjoyed myself amazingly.”

Mr. Pringle looked hard at his friend, and whistled plaintively.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE OLD OR THE NEW ?

THIRTY years before the date of my story, Braxton Murray and Alan Prescott were college friends. Braxton was a gentleman commoner of Christchurch; Alan, a scholar of Wadham. Braxton had four hundred a-year allowance from his father, and the direct succession to one of the richest estates in Kent. Alan had his scholarship, seventy pounds a-year exhibition from a country foundation-school, and another fifty allowed him by his uncle. The disparity between the positions of the two young men was vast, but they were thoroughly attached to each other; and when Braxton had succeeded his father, and the old vicar of Havering died, Braxton Murray sent for Alan Prescott, then doing duty as a curate and usher in a suburban school, and presented him with the vicarage of Havering. That was a happy time in both their lives; the income of the Vicar was small, certainly, but so was the parish, and the duties were light; and having only himself, his wife, and a son and daughter to provide for, and being constantly in the receipt of presents from his friend and patron, the Rev. Alan Prescott did very well indeed. Situate in the heart of Kent, no prettier spot than Havering can be found; and Brooklands, the squire's place, is the gem of the county. In the bay-window of the old dining-room, overhanging the fertile valley through which the Medway lies like a thread of silver, the two men would sit drinking their claret, discussing old university chums or topics of the day, and pausing occasionally to look at the gambols of the Vicar's son, Jim, and the Squire's only

daughter, Emily, who were the merriest of little lovers. But as years went by, and the Vicar's family steadily increased,—first by twin girls, then by a bouncing boy, and finally by a little crippled girl,—and as, each year, expenses grew heavier, Alan Prescott was somewhat put to it to obtain the necessary connexion of those two ends, the means of bringing which together puzzles so many of us all our lives; and when the governors of the foundation-school where he had been usher, remembering his abilities, wrote to offer him the vacant head-mastership, he was too poor to refuse it. Duffborough, a big, staring, gaunt, manufacturing town, perched on one of the bleakest of the northern hills, was a bad exchange for beaming little Havering, with its smiling orchards and glorious hop-gardens; and the society of the purse-proud, cold, stuck-up calico-men was heart-breaking after the ease and warmth of Braxton Murray's companionship. But Alan Prescott felt the spurs of need, and buckled to his work like a man. An active correspondence was kept up between him and the Squire of Havering; and occasionally,—once in the course of four or five years, perhaps,—he had spent a week at Brooklands; but it was too expensive to remove his family; and consequently, until that evening in Saxe-Coburg Square, James Prescott had not seen Emily Murray since they were children together, playing out in the old dining-room at Brooklands.

Emily Murray had been a pretty child; had become a beautiful girl. There was no doubt about her; one look into those honest brown eyes would have convinced you that she was thorough. A plump rosy-rounded bud of woman; a thoroughly English girl, void of affectation, conceit, and trickery; clean, clear, honest, wholesome, and loving. As she talked to James Prescott of the old days at Havering, she spoke out freely, referring to bygone gambols and fun with frank laughter and many a humorous reminiscence; and when she suggested his joining their riding-party the next day, she looked him straight in the face without the smallest shadow of en-

tanglement or guile. To her own brother her manner had not been different, Prescott thought, as, after they had parted, he recalled every word, every glance; and he wished for a moment that there had been something different in it, a trifle more tenderness, a hand-pressure, a sly upward glance, or—and then he flung such nonsense behind him, and was delighted to remember the warmth of her recognition, the cheeriness of her chat. She was nothing to him, of course; his doom was fixed; he had loved, and—and yet how pretty she was! how perfectly gloved! how charmingly dressed! what a pleasure it was to feel that you were talking to a lady! to know that no slanginess would offend the eye, no questionable *argot* grate upon the ear; to feel that—and then Mr. Prescott remembered how the idol of his soul had called him “Jim,” ay, and “old buffer;” how she had smoked cigars, and used maledictions towards refractory animals; how there had been all kinds of odd discussions about all kinds of odd people before her; and how he had seen men take wine without stint, and smoke cigars in her face, and wear their hats before her, without the smallest self-restraint. And, smoking a final pipe before turning into bed, Mr. Prescott pondered on these things long and earnestly.

Mr. Prescott found a warm welcome awaiting him. Mrs. Wilmslow had been impressed with his manners and appearance, and old Mr. Murray had a yearning for the friend of his youth, and longed to receive that friend's son with open arms. A hale pleasant gentleman, Mr. Murray, with that wonderful cleanliness which is never seen out of England, with polished bald head fringed with iron-gray hair, ruddy complexion, keen little blue eyes, and brilliant teeth. He wore a slipper on his right foot, but hobbled forward, nevertheless, and gave the young man a hearty shake of the hand.

“Glad to see you, Jim! Little Jim you were; but, by Jove! I should not like to carry you on my back now, as I have done many a time. Very glad to see you! Old

times come again, by George! Trace every feature of your face, and can almost see Magdalen tower behind your back—you're so like your father. How's the Vicar, eh? I'll drag him out of that infernal spinning-jenny place yet, and give him a breather across the home-copse at Havering before next season's over."

Prescott said that his father was well and jolly, but scarcely up to shooting now, he had had so little practice lately.

"So much the more reason we should give it him, then! He used to be a crack shot; one of the few men I've seen shoot a brace of woodcock right and left! And walk! by George, he'd walk me into—has he had any gout?"

"Not yet, sir;—a threatening last year."

"Bravo!" roared the old gentleman; "I've got some 20-port that shall bring that threatening to real effect, if he'll only drink enough of it. And to think that Pussy should have found you out!"

"Pussy?" said Mr. Prescott.

"Emily, of course! a wayward gentle puss who never shows her claws!" and at that moment Emily entered the room, and advanced towards Prescott with frank smile and outstretched hand.

Luncheon passed off pleasantly enough. The old gentleman rattled on incessantly, and availed himself of Prescott's presence, and Mrs. Wilmslow's distracted attention consequent thereupon, to take three bumpers of dry sherry, instead of that one half-glass to which, by doctor's orders, he was so strictly relegated. Mrs. Wilmslow was thoroughly charmed with Prescott, led him on to talk of his home-life, of his office friends, and seemed to regard him with real interest. Emily was less talkative than she had been the previous evening, and seldom looked up from the table; but she joined readily in the conversation, and none were too pleased when the horses were announced.

"Got a horse, Jim?" asked the Squire. "That's right! hope it'll carry you all right, though one never

knows any thing about these hired hacks. You might have ridden the cob, if I'd known you'd been coming earlier! This is his third day's rest, and the cob will be about as fresh as paint when I get across him again. Not that I care much for your Rotten-Row riding—dull work that, up and down, up and down! The Vicar and I—we used to go to work in a little more business-like fashion than that! I suppose he never gets a day's run now? Ah! thought not! Those spinning-jenny locals would think it unprofessional for a parson to follow hounds, eh? There, bless you, pussy! good-by, child! and good-by to you, young Jim! Call here again in a day or two, and we'll settle about your coming to Havering in the vacation—and the Vicar too, d'ye hear?”

“I'm getting rather nervous about my responsibility, Miss Murray,” said Prescott, as they passed through into the hall. “I don't think I've forgotten my old knack of mounting. You needn't fear my not lifting you high enough, or jerking you over the side, I mean; but I've never seen your amazonship yet, and if any thing should happen—”

“Oh, don't fear that, James—Mr. Prescott, I mean!” said Emily with a clear ringing laugh. “You'll mount me rightly enough, I know: and as for looking after me afterwards, I forgot to tell you my riding-mistress would be with us.”

“Your riding-mistress!” but as he spoke, the footman threw open the street-door; and the first thing that met his glance was a well-known figure sitting erect on a black thorough-bred. Kate Mellon! no one else. James Prescott had watched too often the rounded outline of that compact figure, the fall of that dark-blue skirt, the *pose* of that neat little chimney-pot hat, under which the gold-shot hair was massed in a clump behind, not to recognise them all at the first glance. Kate Mellon, by all that was marvellous! Two young ladies, also mounted, were with her; and a groom was leading another horse, with a side-saddle on it for Emily Murray, and another groom was leading the very presentable hack which Pres-

cott had engaged from Allen's. As she caught sight of Prescott, Kate gave one little scarcely-perceptible start, and then saluted Miss Murray with uplifted whip. Prescott swung Emily to her saddle, and the cavalcade started.

"You see I have brought a cavalier, Miss Mellon," said Emily, with a smile; "though I don't know whether such an encumbrance is permissible; but this is Mr. Prescott, whom I have known for a very long time. James, this is Miss Mellon, who is good enough to superintend my clumsiness on horseback, and who is the very star of horsewomen herself."

Kate started a little at the "James," but merely repeated the whip salutation, and said, "Mr. Prescott and I have met before, Miss Murray. Besides, you're coming it too strong about yourself! you're quite able to take care of yourself now, and have no clumsiness left, whatever you might have had at first. This has relieved me of some of my charge; for these two young ladies will want all my eyes, and another to spare, if I had it. Perhaps you'll not mind my riding forward with them, and you and Mr. Prescott can follow us; you're both of you to be trusted—with your horses, I mean!" and she smiled shortly, and cantering on, joined the anonymous young ladies in front.

You see it is perfectly right to tell a man who is desperately smitten with you that he is on the wrong tack; that though you have a great regard for him as a friend, you cannot reciprocate his love-passion; and that the whole affair is ill-judged, and should properly be put a stop to at once. But when you come upon him suddenly, within three weeks, evidently consoling himself by dangling at the heels of another woman—well, there is something provoking in it, to say the least! Kate Mellon was thoroughly honest during all that last interview with Prescott in Rotten Row, but she scarcely expected *this*.

So they rode on in two divisions; and the young ladies in front, who were the daughters of a picture-dealer who had recently risen from nothing, and who were in the greatest state of fright at the unaccustomed exercise,

were surprised to find a tone of asperity at first tinging their mistress's instructions at being told of their rounded shoulders and their heavy hands, in far plainer terms than had been hitherto employed. But this severity gradually subsided as they went on, and as Kate thought to herself how all was for the best, and how, instead of being annoyed, she ought to do every thing she could to help the fortunes of one who had been so stanchly gallant to her, until he was repulsed. As for the couple behind, they got on splendidly; Emily looked to the greatest advantage on horseback; and Prescott could scarcely take his eyes from her as he watched the graceful manner in which she sat her horse, and as he listened to the encomiastic remarks which her appearance extracted from the passers-by. He talked to her of the old days, and she answered without an ounce of coquetry or affectation; and she spoke of her father, of her happiness in her home, of the little simple duties and pleasures in their village, and of other little such-like matters, in an honest way that touched James Prescott deeply, and sent purer, calmer thoughts into his heart than had found lodging there for many months.

After a couple of hours in the Row the party returned to Mrs. Wilmslow's, where Emily bade them farewell, and Prescott also alighted, giving up his horse to the groom waiting for it. Kate Mellon saw her other pupils to their home close by, and then turned into the Row again, intending to have one final gallop on her way to The Den. She was at full speed when she heard the dull thud of a horse's hoofs close behind her, and turning saw Mr. Simmel. In a minute he was by her side.

"How d'ye do, Kate?" said he, reining-in his big hunter; "I came on the chance of seeing you here."

"How do, Simmel?" said Miss Mellon, shortly; "what do you want?"

"I want you to say when I can come up to The Den and have half-an-hour's chat with you, Kate."

"And I tell you, never! as I've told you before. Look here, Simmel," said she, pulling up short; "let's

have this out now. I don't like you; I never did, and I never shall! and I don't want you at my place. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly," said Simnel, with a hard smile; "and yet I think I must come. I want to say something specially particular to you."

"What about? What you've said before? About yourself?"

"No," said Simnel, smiling as before; "I never say things twice over. I want to talk to you about a friend of ours—Charles Beresford."

"Charles Beresford?—what of him?"

"That's just what I propose to come and tell you."

Their eyes met. The next instant Kate cast hers down as she said, "I shall be at home on Friday from two till six. You can come then."

"You may depend on me," said Simnel; "I'll not bore you any longer." He raised his hat with perfect politeness, turned his horse, and rode slowly away.

CHAPTER XX.

THE CHURCHILLS AT HOME.

THREE months' experience sufficiently indoctrinated Barbara Churchill into her new life. At the end of that time she could scarcely have been recognised as the Barbara Lexden who had held her own for three seasons, and done undisputed havoc among the detrimentals: not that she was changed in appearance; that grand *hauteur*, that indefinable something of delicacy, breeding, and refinement, was even more noticeable than ever; if any thing, her nostrils were more frequently expanded, her lips more constantly in their curve; nor had her eyes lost their brightness, her figure its trim form, her walk its grace and elegance. Though Parker had long since served under another mistress, Barbara's hair had never been more artistically arranged than by her own hands; and though her dress had been modified from the nearest approach to excess in the prevailing fashion which good taste would permit to the merest simplicity, she had never, even in the height of her queendom, been more becomingly attired than in the plain silk dresses and simple linen collars and cuffs which she donned in Great Adullam Street. Where was the change, then? whence the source of the alteration? In truth she herself could scarcely tell; or if the idea ever rose in her mind she thrust it out instantly, arguing within herself, in a thousand unimpressive, undecided, unsatisfactory ways, that she did *not* feel as she had imagined, and that she was merely "a little low."

That phrase was Frank Churchill's bane. He would return from the *Statesman* Office, where, after the regular

daily consultation, he had remained and written his leader (Harding always hitherto had managed to free his friend from night-work), and would find his wife with red-rimmed eyelids and the final traces of a past shower. At first he was frightened at these manifestations, would tenderly caress her, and ask her what had happened, Nothing! always nothing! no cross, no domestic anxiety, no special trouble. But then something must have happened. Frank's logical spirit, long trained, refused to accept an effect without a cause; and at length, after repeated questioning, he would learn from Barbara that she was "a little low" that day. A little low! What on earth had she had to be a little low about? And then Frank would imagine that there were more things in women than were dreamt of in his philosophy; and would pet her and coax her during dinner, and restore her somewhat to herself, until he took up his review or his heavy reading, when the "little low" fit would come on again; and after half an hour's contemplation of the coals Barbara would burst into sobs and retire to bed. And then Frank, laying down his book and pondering over his final pipe, would first begin to think that he was badly treated; to review his conduct, and see whether any act of his during the day could have caused the "little lowness;" to imagine that Barbara was making mountains of molehills, and was losing that spirit which had been one great attraction to him; then gradually he would soften, would take into consideration the changes in the circumstances of her life; would begin to accuse himself of neglecting her, and preferring his reading at a time when she had a fair claim on his attention; and would finally rush off to implore her forgiveness, and pet her more than ever.

An infatuated fellow, this Frank Churchill; so happy in the possession of his wife, in the knowledge that she was his own, all his own, that nothing, not even the fact that she was occasionally a "little low," had power to damp his happiness for more than a very few minutes. He would sit at dinner of an evening, when she was en-

gaged with her work, and he had a book in front of him, in company, when he could steal a minute from the general conversation, looking at her in rapt admiration; not one point of her beauty was lost upon him; the shape of her head; its *pose* on her neck; her delicate hands with that pink shell-like palm; those long tapering fingers and filbert nails; her rounded bust and slim waist,—all her special excellences impressed him more now than they had when he had first seen her; but, above all, he revelled in her “bred” appearance, in that indefinable something which seemed to lift her completely out of the set of people with which he saw her surrounded, and to show her by right the denizen of another sphere. If you could have persuaded Frank Churchill that another man held such opinions as these; that another man had such feelings with regard to his wife; and that through holding them he was induced to regard somewhat intolerantly those among whom he had hitherto moved, and from whom he had received the greatest kindness and friendship,—what words would have been scathing enough to have expressed Frank Churchill’s disgust!

Yet such was undoubtedly the case. Churchill’s most intimate friend was George Harding,—a man whom he revered and looked up to, but whom he, since his marriage, had often found himself pitying from the bottom of his soul. Not on his own account: loyal to his craft and steadfast in his friendship, Churchill thought there were few more desirable positions than the editorship of the *Statesman*, when as free from influence or partisanship as when Harding held the berth. It was because his friend was Mrs. Harding’s husband that Churchill pitied him; though, indeed, Mrs. Harding was a very fair average kind of woman. A dowdy little person, Mrs. Harding! the daughter of a snuffy Welsh rector, who had written a treatise on “Aorists,” and with whom Harding had read one long vacation,—a round-faced old-maidish little woman, classically brought up, who could construe Cicero fluently, and looked upon

Horace (Q. Flaccus, I mean) as rather a loose personage. In the solitude of Plas-y-dwdllem, George Harding was thrown into the society of this young female. He did not fall in love with her—they were neither of them capable of any thing violent of that nature; but—I am reduced to the phraseology of the servants' hall to express my meaning—they “kept company together;” and when George took his degree and started in life as leader-writer for the *Morning Cracker* (long since defunct), he thought the best thing he could do for his comfort was to go for a run to Wales and bring back Sophia Evans as his wife. This he did; and they had lived thoroughly happily ever since. Mrs. Harding believed intensely in the *Statesman*; read it every day, from the title to the printer's name; knew the name of every contributor, and could tell who had done what at a glance. Her great pride in going out was to take one of the cards sent to the office, and observe the effect it made upon the receiving attendant at operas, flower-shows, or conversazioni. She always took care that the tickets for these last were sent to her; and her head-dress of black-velvet bows with pearl-beads hanging down behind was well to the fore whenever a mummy was unrolled, the fossil jaw-bone of an antediluvian animal was descanted on, or some sallow missionary presented himself at Burlington House, to be congratulated by hundreds of dreary people on having escaped uneaten from some place to which he never ought to have gone. She herself was fond of having occasionally what she called “a social evening.” This recreation was held on a Saturday, when there was no work at the *Statesman* office, when the principal members of the staff would be bidden, and when the condiments provided would be brown-bread and butter rolled into *cornels*, tea and coffee and lemonade, while the recreation consisted in conversation (amongst men who had met for every night during the past twelve months), and in examining photographs of the city of Prague. The ribald young men at the office spoke of Mrs. Harding as “Plutarch,” a name given to her one night when Mr. Slater,

the dramatic critic, asked her what novel she was then reading, and she replied, "Novel, sir! Plutarch's Lives!" But they all liked her, notwithstanding; and for her sake and their dear old chief's did penitential duty at the occasional "social evenings" in Decorum Street.

Of course this little body had nothing in common with Mrs. Frank Churchill, and neither understood the other. George Harding had been so anxious that his wife should pay all honour to his friend's bride, that Mrs. Harding's was the first visit Barbara received. They did not study the laws of etiquette in Mesopotamia, or Mrs. Harding thought she would break the ice of ceremony with a friendly call; so she arrived one morning at 11 A.M. dressed for the occasion, and having sent up her card, awaited Barbara's advent in the drawing-room. No sooner had the servant shut the door and Mrs. Harding found herself alone than she minutely examined the furniture, saw where new things had replaced others with which she had been acquainted, mentally appraised the new carpet, and took stock generally. The result was not satisfactory; an anti-macassar which Barbara had been braiding lay on the table, with the needle still in it. Mrs. Harding took it up between her finger and thumb, gazed at it contemptuously, and pronounced it "fal-lal;" she peeped into the leaves of a book lying open on the sofa, and shut them up with a sigh of "Novels! ah!" she turned over the music lying on the little cottage-piano which Frank had hired for his wife, and again shrugged her shoulders with an exclamation of distaste. Then she sat herself down on a low chair with her back to the light (an old campaigner, Mrs. Harding, and seldom to be taken at a disadvantage), pulled out and smoothed her dress all round her, settled her ribbons, made a further incursion into the territories of a refractory thumb in her cowskin puce-coloured glove, which had hitherto refused submission to the invader, and awaited the coming of her hostess.

She had not long to wait. Frank had gone out on business; but he had so often spoken of Harding as his

dear friend, that Barbara, though by no means gushing by nature,—indeed, if truth must be told, somewhat proud and reserved,—had made up her mind to be specially friendly to Mrs. Harding; so she came sailing into the room with outstretched hand and a smile on her face. Mrs. Harding gave one glance at the full flowing figure, the rustling skirts, and the outstretched hand; she acknowledged the superior presence, and then suddenly maxims learned in her youth in the still seclusion of Plas-y-dwdllem rose in her mind,—maxims which inculcated a severe and uncompromising deportment as the very acme of good breeding. So, instead of coming forward to meet Barbara and responding to her apparent warmth, the little woman stood up for a quarter of a minute, crossed her hands before her, bowed, and sank into her seat again. For an instant Barbara stopped, and flushed to the roots of her hair; then, quickly perceiving it was merely ignorance which had caused this strange proceeding on Mrs. Harding's part, she advanced and seated herself near her visitor.

"You are a stranger in this neighbourhood?" commenced Mrs. Harding.

Barbara, feeling that the admission would be what policemen call "used against her," answered in the affirmative.

"It's very healthy," said Mrs. Harding.

Barbara again assented.

"Do you like it?" asked Mrs. Harding.

"I can scarcely say. I have had so little opportunity of judging. It is very convenient for where my husband has to go, and all that; but it is a long way from that part of London which I know."

Two or three things in this innocently-intended speech jarred dreadfully on Mrs. Harding's feelings. That worthy matron had all the blood of Ap-somebody, a tremendously consonanted personage of Plas-y-dwdllem in old times, and she was irritable in the highest degree. But she made a great gulp at her rage, and only said, "Oh, you mean the *Statesman* office; yes, of course I

ought to know where that is, considering Mr. Harding's position there! We think this a very nice situation; but, of course, when you've been brought up in Grosvenor Square, it's different! What does Vokins charge you?"

"I—I beg your pardon!" said Barbara. "Vokins?"

"Yes; Vokins the butcher!" repeated the energetic little woman. "Sevenpence or sevenpence-halfpenny for legs? Your mother-in-law was the only woman in the neighbourhood who got 'em for sevenpence, and I'm most anxious to know whether he hasn't raised it since you came here."

"I'm sorry I'm unable to answer you," said Barbara; "but hitherto my husband has paid the tradesmen's bills. I've no doubt" she added, with a half-sneer, "that it shows great shortcomings on my part; but it is the fact. I have hopes that I shall improve as I go on."

"Oh, no doubt," said Mrs. Harding, faintly. "Live and learn, you know." But she gave up Barbara Churchill from that time out. She, who had known the price of every article of domestic consumption since she was fourteen years old, and had fought innumerable hand-to-hand combats with extortionate tradesmen, looked upon this *insouciance* of Barbara's as any thing but a venial crime. A few other topics were started, feebly entered into, and dropped; and then Mrs. Harding took her leave, with faintly-expressed hopes of seeing her new-made acquaintance soon again.

That afternoon George Harding, returning home to dinner, was told by his wife that she had called on Mrs. Churchill.

"Ay!" said the honest old boy; "and what did you make of her, Sophy? I'd trust your judgment in a thousand; and Frank has a high opinion of it, I know. Is she pretty, and clever, and managing, and all the rest of it?"

"Well, as to prettiness, George, she's not one of my style of beauties," said Mrs. Harding. "She's a tall slip of a woman, with straight features, such as you see on the old coins; and she's very stand-offish in her manners;

and, as to managing—well, she's too fine a lady to know her tradespeople's names, or what she pays them."

George Harding whistled softly, and then plunged into his hashed mutton. He made but one remark, but that he repeated twice. "I told him to beware of swells. God knows I warned him. I told him to beware of swells."

That same night Mrs. Churchill told her husband of the visit she had had.

"I'm so glad!" said Frank. "I knew old George would send his wife first. Well, what do you think of Mrs. Harding, Barbara?"

"Oh, I've no doubt she meant every thing kindly, Frank," said Barbara. "She's—she's a right-meaning kind of woman, Frank, no doubt; but she's—she's not my style, you know."

Frank was dashed. "I don't exactly understand, dear. She was perfectly friendly?"

"Oh, perfectly! But she asked me all sorts of curious questions about the tradespeople, and the housekeeping, and that. So strange, you know."

"I confess I don't see any thing strange so far. She offered you the benefit of her experience, did she? Well, that was kind; and what was wanted, I think."

"Oh, I'm sorry you think it was wanted," said Barbara. "I didn't think any thing had gone wrong in the house."

"No, my darling, of course not," said Frank; "nothing—all is quite right. But, you know, housekeeping is Mrs. Harding's strong point; and young beginners like ourselves might learn from her with advantage. I think we must lay ourselves out for instruction in several matters, Barbara darling, from such persons as Mrs. Harding and my mother."

And Barbara said, "Oh, yes, of course." And Frank did not notice that her little shoulders went up, and the corners of her little mouth went down, and her eyes sparkled in a manner which did not promise much docility on the part of one of the pupils thus to be instructed.

It took but a very short time for Barbara to discover that she and her mother-in-law were not likely to be the very best friends. On their first meeting the old lady was very much overcome, and welcomed her new daughter-in-law in all fulness of heart. And perhaps—though Barbara never knew it—it was at this first meeting that a feeling of disappointment was engendered in Mrs. Churchill's heart. For long brooding over the forthcoming events of that day, ere the new-married couple had returned to town, Mrs. Churchill had settled in her own mind that there were to be no jealousies between her and the new importation into the small family circle as to the possession of Frank, and that to that end the right plan would be to receive Barbara as her daughter, and to make her part recipient of that affection which had hitherto only been lavished on Frank. This idea she forthwith carried into execution, kissing Barbara with great warmth, and addressing her as her dear child. Unimpulsive Barbara, though really pleased at her reception, accepted the caresses with becoming dignity, offered her cheek for the old lady's warm salute, and addressed her mother-in-law in tones which, though by no means lacking in reverence, certainly had no superfluity of love. The old lady noticed it, and ascribed it to timidity, or the natural shyness of a young girl in a strange position; she noticed specially that Barbara invariably spoke to and of her as "Mrs. Churchill;" and before they parted she said:

"My dear, you surely don't always intend to speak to me in that formal manner. I am your mother now, Barbara; won't you call me so?"

"No, dear Mrs. Churchill—no, if you please! I have never called any one by that name since I lost my own mother, and—and I cannot do so, indeed."

Mrs. Churchill simply said, "Very well, my dear." But in what afterwards became a gaping wound, this may be looked upon as the first abrasion of the skin. That gave the old lady a notion that her daughter-in-law's tactics were to be purely defensive, that there was to be no

compromise, and that she, the old lady, was clearly to understand that her position was on the other side of the gabions and the fascines, the stone walls and the broad moat ; that by no means was the key of the citadel to be considered as in her possession.

When relations of this kind in one family begin to be *à tort et à travers*, there is no end to the horrible complications arising out of them. Mrs. Churchill attempted to initiate Barbara into the mysteries of housekeeping, and the art of successfully combating nefarious tradesmen ; but the success which attended the old lady's efforts may be guessed from Barbara's interview with Mrs. Harding. She tried to get Barbara to walk out with her ; but Barbara had not been accustomed to walk in London streets, and was timid at crossings,—which made the old lady irate ; and was frightened at the way in which men stared, and on some occasions spoke out unreservedly their opinions of her beauty. She had liked the outspoken admiration of the crowd, as she sat well forward in the carriage on drawing-room days ; but then she knew that she had Jeames with his long cane in reserve in case of need ; though I doubt whether Jeames would have been more useful in case of actual attack than old Mrs. Churchill, who invariably resented these unsolicited compliments to her daughter-in-law with a snort of defiance, and who usually carried a stout umbrella with a ferule at the end, which would have made a very awkward weapon, and which she would have wielded with right good will. Misunderstandings were constant : after the first few occasions of their meeting, Barbara did not ask Mrs. Churchill to the house for fear of appearing formal ; whereupon the old lady, when Frank called at her lodgings, asked what she had done to be exiled from her son's house. Pacified and settled as to this point, the old lady, to show her forgiveness, called in so frequently, that Barbara told her husband she knew her housekeeping was not perfection ; but that she had not expected a system of *espionnage*, which was evidently kept on her by his mother. When Mrs. Churchill dined

at their house, Barbara, for fear of appearing extravagant, would have a very simple joint and pudding ; whereupon the old lady would afterwards tell Mrs. Harding, or some other friend, that "Heaven alone knew where Frank's money went—not on their dinners, my dear, for they're positively mean."

Nor with her husband's friends did Barbara make a very favourable impression. They admired her, of course ; to withhold that tribute was impossible ; but they were so utterly different in manner and expression, had such different topics of conversation and such totally opposite opinions to any thing she had ever seen or heard, that she sat in silence before them ; uttered vague and irrational replies to questions put to her while her thoughts were far away, smiled feebly at wrong times, and so conducted herself, that Mr. M'Malthus, a clever Scotchman, who was worming his way into literature, and was at that time getting a name for blunt offensive sayings (an easily-earned capital, on which many a man has lived for years), was reported to have remarked that "a prettier woman or a bigger fool than Mrs. Churchill was not often seen."

There were others who, while they allowed that she had plenty of common-sense (and indeed on occasion, in a cut-and-thrust argument, Barbara showed herself cunning of fence, and by no means deficient in repartee), would call her stuck-up and proud ; and there were some, indeed, who repudiated the mere fact of her having lived in a different class of society to which they were not admitted, as in itself an insult and a shame. And even those who were disposed to soften all defects and to exaggerate all virtues—and they were by no means few in number—failed to what they call "get on" with the new Mrs. Churchill. They had no subjects of conversation in common ; for even when literary subjects were introduced, they frightened Barbara by their iconoclastic tendencies ; deliberately smashing up all those gods whom she had hitherto been accustomed to reverence, and erecting in their stead images inscribed with names unknown to her, or known but to be shuddered at as owned

by Radicals or free-thinkers. They were men who outraged none of the social *convénances* of life ; about whose manner or behaviour no direct complaint could be made; and often she thought herself somewhat exacting when she would repeat to herself, as she would—oh, how often!—that they were not gentlemen: not her style of gentlemen ; that is to say, not the style of men to whom she had been accustomed. When, for instance, would a man have dared to address his conversation to any other man in preference to her, she being present? When could a man have permitted her to open a door, or place a chair for herself, in that set amongst which she had previously moved? Respect her! Her husband's friends would ignore her presence ; saying in reply to a remark from her, "Look here, Churchill, you understand this;" or would prevent her interrupting them (a favourite practice of hers) by putting up their hands and saying, "Pardon me while I state my case," continue their argument in the most dogged manner.

What most amazed Barbara was the calm manner in which all her sallies, however bitter or savage, were received by her husband's intimates, and laughed away or glossed over by Frank himself. At first her notion was to put down these persons by a calm haughty superiority or a studied reticence, which should in itself have the effect of showing her opinion of them: but neither demeanour had the smallest effect on those whom it was intended to reprove. The first time she ever perceived that any one was the least degree inclined to oppose her sway or dispute her authority, was one Saturday night, when Churchill's study was filled with several of his old friends, smoking and chatting. Barbara was there too, with her embroidery. She could stand tobacco-smoke perfectly; it did not give her a headache, or even worse than that, redden her eyelids and make her wink; and there was a small amount of "fastness" in it which pleased her. Moreover her presence prevented the gathering in the *tabagie* from quite sinking into a bachelor revel, the which Barbara, as a young married woman, held in the

deepest abomination. The conversation was in full swing about books, authors, and publishers.

"Chester's going to bring out a volume of poems," said Mr. Bloss, an amiable young man with fluffy hair, who always had a good word for every one. "Says he should have published them before, but he's so many irons in the fire."

"Better put his poems where his irons are," laughed Mr. Dunster, a merry little old gentleman with light-blue eyes, who could take the skin off your back and plant daggers in your heart, smiling all the time in the pleasantest manner. "Chester's next door to an idiot; lives close by you, by the way, Bloss, doesn't he?"

All the men laughed; and even Barbara, after a look of amazement, could not help smiling.

"He's dreadfully frightened of the critics," said another man sitting by. "You must notice him in the *Statesman* yourself, Churchill, eh?"

"Or I'll speak to Harding. Poor Chester! he mustn't be allowed to come to grief. What are his verses like? has any one seen them?"

"I have," said Mr. Bloss. "They're really—they're—well—they're not so very bad, you know."

"What a burst of candour!" said Mr. Dunster. "Bloss, you are a young reviewer, and I must caution you against such excessively strong statements."

"Chester's most afraid of the *Scourge*," said the man who had spoken before; "he thinks it will flay him."

"He should mollify them by saying that his verses were written 'at an early age,'" laughed Churchill.

"That wouldn't do for the *Scourge*; they would say the verses were too bad even to have been written by a child in arms," said Mr. Dunster.

"How *very* nice! What an old dear you are, Dunster!" said a gentleman sitting in a corner of the fireplace exactly opposite Barbara, with his legs stretched out on a stool, and his body reclining on an easy-chair. This was Mr. Lacy, an artist, who, as it was, made a very good income, but who might have taken the highest rank had

his perseverance been on a par with his talent; a sleepy, dreamy man, with an intense appreciation of and regard for himself.

"What do you think of all this, Mrs. Churchill?" asked Bloss; "they are any thing but compassionate in their remarks."

"They may be or not," said Barbara, wearily. "It is all Greek to me: while these gentlemen talk what I believe is called 'shop,' I am utterly unable to follow the conversation."

Frank looked uneasily across at his wife, but said nothing.

"What shall we talk about, Mrs. Churchill?" said Mr. Dunster, with an evil twinkle of his blue eyes. "Shall it be the last ball in the Belgravia, or the new *jupe*; how Mario sang in the *Prophète*, or whether bonnets will be worn on or off the head?"

Churchill frowned at this remark, but his brow cleared as Barbara said with curling lip:

"You need not go so far for illustrations of what you don't understand, Mr. Dunster. Let us discuss tolerance, domestic enjoyments, or the pleasure of being liked by any one,—all of which are, I am sure, equally strange to you."

Mr. Dunster winced, and the fire faded out of his blue eyes: he did not understand being bearded. Frank Churchill, though astonished at seeing his wife defiant, was by no means displeased. Old Mr. Lacy, fearing a storm, which would have ruffled him sadly, struck in at once:

"It's a mistake, my dear Churchill; I'm convinced of it. We're not fit for these charming creatures, we artists and writers, believe me. We're a deucedly irritable, growling, horrible set of ruffians, who ought to be left, like a lot of Robinson Crusoes, each on a separate island. I can fully enter into Mrs. Churchill's feelings; and I've no doubt that Mrs. Lacy feels exactly the same. But what do I do? I'm compelled to shut the door in Mrs. Lacy's face—to lock Mrs. Lacy out. She's a most

excellent woman, as you know, Churchill; but she always wants to talk to me when I ought to be at work; now, on a sky-day, for instance! There are very few days in the year in this detestable climate, my dear Mrs. Churchill, which permit of one's seeing the sky sufficiently to paint it. When such a day does happen, I go to my studio and lock the door; but I've scarcely set my palette, before they come and rap, and want to talk to me—to ask me about the butcher, or to tell me about the nurse's sister, or something; and I'm obliged to whistle or sing to prevent my hearing 'em, or I should get interested about the nurse's sister, and open the door, and then my day's work would be spoilt."

"You're right, Lacy," said Dunster: "men who've got work to do should remain single. They'll never—"

"Come, you're polite to my wife," said Frank. "This is flat blasphemy against the state into which we've just entered."

"Oh, pray don't let the conversation, evidently so genial, be stopped on my account. I'm tired, and am just going;" and with a sweeping bow Barbara sailed out of the room.

An hour afterwards, when Frank looked in from his dressing-room, he saw in the dim light Barbara's hair streaming over the pillow, and going to her found traces of tears on her cheeks. Tenderly and eagerly he asked her what had happened.

"Oh, Frank, Frank!" she exclaimed, bursting into fresh sobs; "I see it all now! What those horrid men said is too true! We were worse than mad to marry. Your friends will never understand me, while I shall interfere with your work and your pleasure; and, oh! I am so very, very miserable myself!"

CHAPTER XXI.

THE FLYBYNIGHTS.

To such of womankind as knew of its existence there were few places in London so thoroughly unpopular as the Flybynights Club. And yet it was an unpretending little room, boasting none of the luxury of decoration generally associated in the female mind with notions of club-life, and offering no inducement for membership save that it was open at very abnormal hours, and that it was very select. The necessary qualification for candidature was that you should be somebody; no matter what your profession (provided, of course, that you were a gentleman by position), you must have made some mark in it, shown yourself ahead of the ruck of competitors, before you could have been welcome among the Flybynights. Two or three leading advocates, attached for the most part to the criminal bar; half-a-dozen landscape and figure painters of renown; half-a-dozen actors; a sporting man or two, with the power of talking about something else besides Brother to Bluenose's performances; two or three City men, who combined the most thorough business habits with convivial tastes in the "off" hours; a few members of Parliament, who were compelled to respect the room as a thoroughly neutral ground; a few journalists and authors, and a sprinkling of nothing-doing men about town,—formed the corporate body of the club. What was its origin? I believe that certain members of the Haresfoot Club, finding that establishment scarcely so convivial as report had led them to believe; that the *Dii majores* of the house were a few snuffy old gentlemen, without an idea beyond the asser-

tion of their own dignity and the keeping up of some dreary fictions and time-worn conventionalities; that the delights of the smoking-room, so much talked of in the outer world, in reality consisted in sitting between a talkative barrister and a silent stockbroker, or listening to the complaints against the management of the club by the committee; finding, in fact, that the place was dull, bethought them of establishing another where they could be more amused. Hence the Flybynights.

The Flybynights had no house of their own; they merely occupied a room on the basement of the Orpheus tavern,—a dull sombre old room, with big couches and lounges covered with frayed leather, with a smoky old green-flock paper, and with no ornament save a battered old looking-glass in a fly-blown frame. Occasionally roisterers new to town, on their way to the big concert-room of the Orpheus, where they were to be enchanted with the humour of Mr. Bloss's "Dying Cadger's Lament," or the pathos of Mr. Seeinault's "Trim-built Wherry," would in mistake push open the green-baize door leading to the Flybynights sanctum, and immediately withdraw in dismay at the dinginess of the room and the grim aspect of its occupants. That grimness, however, was only assumed at the apparition of a stranger; when the members were alone among themselves, perfect freedom from restraint was the rule. And if, on the next morning, the jurymen who listened with awe to the withering denunciations which fell from the lips of the learned counsel for the prosecution,—the bank-directors who nodded approval to the suggestions of certain shrewd financiers,—the noble sitters who marked the brows of the artists engaged on their portraits, "sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,"—nay, even the patients who gazed with eager eyes to glean something from the countenances of the physicians then clutching their pulses,—had seen counsel, financiers, artists, and physicians on the previous evening at the Flybynights, they could not have recognised them for the same men. The fame of the club spread; anecdotes

and *bon-mots* ran round town more quickly, and were better received, when they had the Flybynight stamp. It was rumoured that O'Blank and Macaster, the great authors, were occasionally to be seen there in the flesh, conversing like ordinary mortals; heavy swells found out that it was open as late as Pratt's, and asked each other, in elliptic phraseology, "Whether 'twasn't good kind place, eh? met 'musing kind fellahs there; made laugh'n, that kind thing?" But though they made various attempts at election, they never got beyond an occasional visit to the club; friendly attempts to smuggle them in as members were dead failures; and at every ballot, generally held at midnight, the strident voice of Rupert Robinson, author and dramatist, could be heard asking, at the mention of any candidate's name, "Who is he? what can he do? what has he done?" questions which, unless satisfactorily answered, caused the immediate pilling of the pretender to association with the Flybynights.

A few weeks after the Schröders' reception, Beresford and Simnel, who had been dining together, strolled into the club soon after midnight. Beresford was a member; Simnel came as his guest; the latter would have been safe of election, as his tact and shrewdness were very generally known and highly esteemed amongst the men, but he always refused to be put in nomination. "It's all very well for Beresford," he would say; "he's a Commissioner, and can do as he likes; I'm an upper servant; and though you're a deuced pleasant set of fellows, you haven't got a great name for respectability with the B. P., or British Public, whom I serve. It's horribly virtuous, is the B. P., and is always in bed before you sweet youths meet in this bower of bliss. So that though I'm delighted to come occasionally with Charley and pay you a visit, I must be in a position, if called upon, to swear that I'm not an affiliated member of your sacred brotherhood." The other men understood all this, and liked Simnel better for his candour; and there was no visitor at the Flybynights more welcome than he. It was a great oc-

casion at the Flybynights; one of the members, Mr. Plinlimmon the poet, had that day been giving a lecture "On Sentiment, its Use and Abuse," at St. Cecilia's Hall, and had had great success. For Mr. Plinlimmon was not a mere common poet who made verses and sold them; he was cousin to Lady Heritage, whose husband was the Lord Privy-Purse; and he was very well off, and wrote only for his amusement, and consequently was the very man to be patronised. Moreover, he wrote weak little verselets, like very-much-diluted Wordsworth, abounding in passages quotable for Academy pictures of bread-and-butter children; and he was much taken up by Mr. Spicklittle, the editor of the *Boomerang Magazine*, so soon as it was understood that he stood well with the fashionable world. And there had been a very fashionable audience at St. Cecilia's Hall to hear Mr. Plinlimmon on "Sentiment," and the stalls had been filled with what was afterwards stated in the public prints to be the rank and flower of the land; and high-born women had complimented him on the conclusion of his labours, and had voted his lecture charming; all of which thoroughly consoled the lecturer, and enabled him to forget the rude conduct of certain rough-spoken critics in the body of the hall, who had loudly cried "Bosh!" at his finest passages, and gone out with much shuffling of thick boots and dropping of heavy walking-sticks long before his peroration. And after dining with a countess, Mr. Plinlimmon thought that the right thing was to go down and show himself at the Flybynights Club, of which he was a member; and he had entered the room just before Beresford and Simmel arrived.

"Hail, Plinlimmon!" shouted Mr. Magnus the historian, with kindly glances beaming through his spectacles; "hail, bard of the what-d'ye-call-it! How air you, colonel?"

"Hallo, Plinlimmon!" shouted Mr. Rupert Robinson; "been giving a show, haven't you? what sort of house did you have? who looked after your checks? you were very well billed, I noticed."

Plinlimmon shuddered.

"Lecturing, haven't you?" asked Mr. Slater, critic of the *Moon*.

"Yes," said Plinlimmon, "I have been giving a lecture."

"Ah!" said Mr. Schrink, critic of the *Statesman*, "if I'm not wrong, Dr. Johnson defines the verb to lecture as to 'instruct insolently and dogmatically.' You're quite capable of that, Plinlimmon."

"What was your subject, sir?" asked Mr. Mugg, low comedian of the Sanspareil Theatre.

"Sentiment, sir!" said Mr. Plinlimmon, fiercely; it began to dawn on him that he was being chaffed.

"Deary me!" said Mr. Mugg, with feigned wonder and uplifted hands; "sentiment, eh? them's my sentiments!"

"Silence, you ribalds!" said Mr. Magnus. "You had a large attendance, I hear, Plinlimmon; more women than men, though, I suppose? Men don't come in the day-time."

"There was a great gathering of the female aristocracy," said Plinlimmon, perking up his head.

"One old woman jawing always brings together a lot of others," growled Mr. Dunster, beneath his breath. He had been apparently dozing in a far corner of the room, but had roused up at the word "aristocracy,"—as sure an irritant to him as a red rag to a bull,—and his bright blue eyes were gleaming.

"I didn't think much of your delivery, Plinlimmon," said Mr. Slater.

"It was as slow as a mid-day postman's, and not so sure," said Mr. Schrink; "you got uncommonly drowsy and bag-pipy at times."

"I'll tell you what it is, Plinlimmon," said Mr. Dunster; "you are uncommonly dreary! You're a swell, and you can't help it; but you were horribly slow. I'll tell you what it is, my young friend; you're far too dull by yourself,—*you want a piano.*"

During the roar which followed this remark, Beres-

ford felt a light touch on his arm, and turning round saw Dr. Prater.

Not to be known to Dr. Prater was to confess that the "pleasure of your acquaintance" was of little value; for assuredly, had it been worth any thing, Dr. Prater would have had it by hook or by crook. A wonderful man, Dr. Prater, who had risen from nothing, as his detractors said; but however that might be, he had a practice scarcely excelled by any in London. Heart and lungs were Dr. Prater's specialities; and persons imagining themselves afflicted in those regions came from all parts of England, and thronged the doctor's dining-room in Queen-Anne Street in the early forenoons, vainly pretending to read Darwin *On the Fertilisation of Orchids*, the *Life of Captain Hedley Vicars*, or the Supplement of yesterday's *Times*; and furtively glancing round at the other occupants of the room, and wondering what was the matter with them. That dining-room looked rather different about a dozen times in the season, of an evening, when the books were cleared away, and the big bronze gas-chandelier lighted, and the doctor sat at the large round-table surrounded by a dozen of the pleasantest people in London. Such a mixture! Never was such a man for "bringing people together" as Dr. Prater. The manager of the Italian Opera (Dr. Prater's name was to all the sick-certificates for singers) would be seated next to a judge, who would have a leading member of the Jockey Club on his other hand, and a bishop for his *vis-à-vis*. Next the bishop would be a cotton-lord, next to him the artist of a comic periodical, and next to him a rising member of the Opposition, with an Indian colonel and an American comedian, here on a starring engagement, in juxtaposition. The dinner was always good, the wines excellent, and the doctor was the life and soul of the party. He had something special to say to every one; and as his big protruding eyes shone and glimmered through his gold-rimmed spectacles, he looked like a convivial little owl. A very different man over the dinner-table to the smug little pale-faced man

in black, whom wretched patients found in the morning sitting behind a leather-covered table, on which a stethoscope was conspicuously displayed, and who, after sounding the chests of consumptive curates or struggling clerks, would say, with an air of blandness, dashed with sorrow, "I'm afraid the proverbially treacherous air of our climate will not do for us, my dear sir! I'm afraid we must spend our winter at Madeira, or at least at Pau. *Good day to you;*" and then the doctor, after shaking hands with his patient, would slip the tips of his fingers into his trousers-pockets, into which would fall another little paper-package to join a number already there deposited, while the curate or clerk, whose yearly income was perhaps two hundred pounds, and who probably had debts amounting to twice his annual earnings, would go away wondering whether it was better to endeavour to borrow the further sum necessary at ruinous interest, or to go back and die in the cold Lincolnshire clay parish, or in the bleak Northern city, as the case might be. On one thing the doctor prided himself greatly, that he never let a patient know what he thought of him. He would bid a man remove his waistcoat with a semi-jocund air, and the next instant listen to a peculiar "click" inside his frame, which betrayed the presence of heart-disease liable at any moment to carry the man off, without altering a muscle of his face or a tone of his voice. "Hum! ha! we must be a little careful; we must not expose ourselves to the night-air! Take a leetle more care of yourself, my dear sir; for instance, I would wear a wrap round the throat—some wrap, you know, to prevent the cold striking to the part affected. Send this to Bell's, and get it made up, and take it three times a-day; and let me see you on—on Saturday. *Good day to you.*" And there would not be the smallest quiver in the hard metallic voice, or the smallest twinkle in the observant eye behind the gold-rimmed glasses, although the doctor knew that the demon Consumption, by his buffet, had raised that red spot on the sufferer's cheek, and was rapidly eating away his vitality

But if Dr. Prater kept a strict reticence to his patients as regarded their own ailments, he was never so happy as when enlarging to them on the diseases of their fellow-sufferers, or of informing esoteric circles of the special varieties of disorder with which his practice led him to cope. “*You* ill, my dear sir!” he would say to some puny specimen; then, settling himself into his waistcoat after examination, “*you* complain of narrow-chestedness,—why, my dear sir, do you know Sir Hawker de la Crache? You’ve a pectoral development which is perfectly surprising when contrasted with Sir Hawker’s. But then he, poor man! last stage,—Madeira no good,—would sit up all night playing whist at Reid’s Hotel. Algiers no good,—too much brandy, tobacco, and *baccarat* with French officers—nothing any good. *You*, my dear sir, compared to Sir Hawker—pooh, nonsense!” Or in another form: “Any such case, my dear madam? any such case?”—turning to a large book, having previously consulted a small index—“a hundred such! Here, for instance, Lady Susan Bray, now staying at Ventnor, living entirely on asses’-milk—in some of our conditions we must live on asses’-milk—left lung quite gone, life hanging by a thread. You’re a Juno, ma’am, in comparison to Lady Susan!” There was no mistake, however, about the doctor’s talent; men in his own profession, who sneered at his *charlatanerie* of manner, allowed that he was thoroughly well versed in his subject. He was very fond of young men’s society; and, with all his engagements, always found time to dine occasionally with the Guards at Windsor, with a City Company or two, or with a snug set *en petit comité* in Temple chambers, and to visit the behind-scenes of two or three theatres, the receptions of certain great ladies, and occasionally the meetings of the Flybynights Club. To the latter he always came in a special suit of clothes on account of the impregnation of tobacco-smoke; and when coming thither he left his carriage and his address, in case he was required, at the Minerva, with orders to fetch him at once. It would never have done for some of his

patients to know that he was a member of the Flyby-nights.

Such was Dr. Prater, who touched Beresford on the arm and said, "Not again, my dear sir! I will not be balked of the opportunity of saying, 'how d'ye do?' to you again."

"Ah, doctor," said Beresford with that apparent frankness and *bonhomie* to which he owed so much of his popularity, "delighted to see you! But what do you mean 'balked of the opportunity'? Where was that?"

"A few weeks since, just before I left town;—I've been away, and Dr. Seaton has kindly attended to my practice;—we met at the house of our charming friend Mrs. Schröder; but I could not catch your eye. You were too well engaged; there was, as somebody—I don't know who, but somebody that every one knows—has said, there was metal more attractive. Ha! ha! A charming woman, Mrs. Schröder! a very charming woman!"

"Very charming," echoed Mr. Beresford shortly, not particularly caring about finding himself thoroughly focussed by the doctor's sharpest glances concentrated through his spectacles. "By the way, don't you know our secretary, Mr. Simmel, Dr. Prater?"

The gentlemen bowed. "I have the pleasure of being well acquainted with Mr. Simmel by name, and of being at the present moment engaged in a correspondence with him in reference to a certificate which I have given. And, by the way, my dear sir," turning to Simmel, "you really must give young Pierrepont his six weeks. You must indeed!"

"If it rested with me, doctor, I'd give him unlimited leave; confer on him the order of the 'sack,'" said Simmel, bluntly—"an idle stuck-up young hound!"

"Harsh words, my dear sir; harsh words! However, I will leave our young friend's case with you and Mr. Beresford; I am sure it could not be in better hands. You were not in Saxe-Coburg Square the other night, I think? De-lightful party!"

"No," said Simmel, "I'm not a great evening-party man myself; it's only your butterflies of fashion, like our friend here, who enjoy those light and airy gaieties. My pleasures are of a more substantial kind. By the way, doctor, how's Kitty Vavasour's cough?"

The doctor's eyes twinkled as he replied, "Oh, much better—very much better. Horrible draught down that first entrance, my dear sir, as she perhaps told—I mean, as you probably know. Dreadful draught! enough to kill half the *coryphées* in London. I've spoken to Grabb about it, but he won't do any thing; and when I hinted at the drapery, asked me if I thought he was going to let his ballet-girls dance in bathing-gowns. Very rude man, Grabb."

"Very good style they did that in the other night," said Beresford, cutting in—"in Saxe-Coburg Square, I mean—very good, wasn't it? I suppose it was the lady's taste; but when they get hold of a woman with any notion of arrangement and effect, these *parvenu* fellows from the City certainly don't grudge the money for their fun. And in the way the Schröders are living, the establishment must cost a pretty sum, I should imagine."

"A pretty sum indeed, my dear sir," said the doctor. "However, I understand on all sides that Mr. Schröder can perfectly afford it. I hear from those who ought to know" (a great phrase of Dr. Prater's, this) "that his income is princely!" And then the doctor looked at the other two and repeated "princely!" and smacked his lips as though the word had quite a nice taste in his mouth.

"It's a good thing to be a Polish Jew," growled Mr. Simmel. "This fellow's ancestors lent money to long-haired Grafs and swaggering Electors, and got their interest when they could; and thought themselves deuced lucky not to get their teeth pulled out when they asked for a little on account, or not to be put on the fire when they presented their bill. Their descendant lives in pleasanter days; we've given up pulling out their teeth, worse luck! And that neat little instrument, 'Victoria,

by the grace,' is as open to Jews as Christians. I always thought there was something wrong in that."

"This Schröder is a tremendously lucky fellow, by Jove!" said Beresford. "He's got a very pretty wife and an enormous fortune; and though he's not young, to judge from all appearances, has a constitution of iron, and will live for years to enjoy his good fortune."

"Ah, my dear sir," said Dr. Prater in a low and solemn voice, "I'm afraid you're not correct in one particular; not correct in one particular!" and the little man shook his head and looked specially oracular.

Simmel glanced up at him at once from under his heavy eyebrows; but Beresford only said, "Why, doctor, you're not going to try and make me believe any envious disparagement of Schröder's riches?"

"Not for the world, my dear sir; not for the world! Such rumours have been spread! but, as you say, only among the envious and jealous, who would whisper-away Count's credit, and decline to intrust their miserable balance to Barings'! No; my doubts as to Schröder relate to another matter."

"His health?" said Simmel, who had kept his eyes on the solemn little man, and was regarding him keenly.

"Pre-cisely!" said the doctor. And he stepped aside for an instant, helped himself to a pinch of snuff from a box on a neighbouring table, and returned to his companions, gazing up at them with a solemn steady stare that made him look more like an owl than ever.

"His health?" exclaimed Beresford, "why there's surely nothing the matter with that! He has the chest of a horse and the digestion of an ostrich. I don't know a man of his age to whom, to look at, you'd give a longer life."

"Right, my dear sir," replied the doctor, "right enough from a non-professional view. But Mr. Schröder, like the gentleman of whom I have heard, but whose name I can't call to mind, has that within which passeth show. I *know* the exact state of his condition."

"This is very interesting," said Mr. Simmel, drawing

closer to the doctor on the ottoman ; “very interesting, indeed ; yours is a wonderful profession, doctor, for gaining insight into men and things. Would it be too much to ask you to tell us a little more about this particular case ?”

“Well, you know, I don’t often talk of these matters ; there *are* men in our profession, my dear sir, who gossip and chatter, and I believe make it pay very well ; but they are men of no intellect, mere quacks and charlatans—quacks and charlatans ! But with gentlemen like yourselves, men of the world, I don’t mind occasionally revealing a few of the secrets of the—the—what d’ye call ’em ?—prison-house. The fact is—” and the doctor lowered his voice and looked additionally solemn,—“that Mr. Schröder’s life hangs by a thread.”

Both his listeners started, and Mr. Simmel from between his set teeth said, “The devil !”

“By a thread !” repeated the doctor, holding out his finger and thumb as though he actually had the thread between them. “He may go off at any moment ; his life is not certain for an hour ; he’s engaged, as you know, in tremendous transactions, and any sudden fright or passion would be his certain death.”

“Ah, then his disease is—”

“Heart, my dear sir, heart !” said the doctor, tapping himself on the left side of his waistcoat ; “his heart’s diseased,—one cannot exactly say how far, but I suspect strongly,—and he may go out at any moment like the snuff of a candle.”

“Have you known this long ?” asked Beresford.

“Only two days : he came to me two days ago to consult me about a little worrying cough which he described himself as having ; and in listening at his chest I heard the death-beat. No mistaking it, my dear sir ; when you’ve once heard that ‘click,’ you never forget it.”

“By Jove, how horrible !” said Simmel.

“Poor devil ! does he know it himself ?” asked Beresford.

“Know it, my dear sir ? Of course not. You don’t

imagine I told him? Why the shock might have killed him on the spot. Oh, dear, no! I prescribed for his cough, and told him specially to avoid all kind of excitement: that was the only warning I dare give him."

As the doctor said this, Mr. Simnel rose. "It's a horrible idea," said he with a shudder—"horrible!"

"Very common, my dear sir, very common. If you knew how many men there are whom I meet out at dinner, in society, here and there, whom I know to be as distinctly marked for death as if I saw the plague-spot on their breasts!"

"Well, you've completely frightened me," said Beresford. "I'll get home to bed, and try and forget it in sleep. Are you coming, Simnel? Good night, doctor." And the two gentlemen went out together, leaving the little doctor already sidling up to another group.

When they were out in the street, and had started on their homeward walk, Simnel said to his companion:

"That was strange news we've just heard."

"Strange, indeed," replied Beresford. "Do you think the doctor's right?"

"Not a doubt of it; he's a garrulous idiot; as full of talk as an old woman; but I have always heard very skilful in his profession, and in this special disease I believe there are none to beat him. Oh, yes, he's right enough. Well, you always held winning cards, and now the game looks like yours."

"Simnel," said Beresford, stopping short and looking up into his face, "what the devil do you mean?"

"Mean!" echoed Simnel; "I'll tell you when you come on; it's cold stopping still in the streets, and the policeman at the corner is staring at you in unmitigated wonder. Mean!" he repeated, as they walked on; "well, it's not a very difficult matter to explain. You hear that Schröder has heart-disease—that at any moment he may die. You always had a partiality for Mrs. Schröder, I believe; and if there be any truth in what I gather from yourself and others, you stand very well with her."

"Well?"

“Well! You’re dense to-night, Master Charley. Well? Why, you’ve as great a chance as man ever had before you. You’ve only to wait until what Prater told us of happens,—and if he’s right, it won’t be long,—and then marry the widow and start as a millionaire.”

“By Jove, it *is* a great chance!” said Beresford, looking at his friend.

“And yet you didn’t see it until just now. Why, it opened straight up in front of me the instant that chattering medico mentioned the fact. If you play your cards well, you’re all right; but remember, flirtation and courtship are two different things, and must be managed differently. And recollect it’s for the latter you’re now going in. Now, here’s my street, so adieu. Sleep on this matter, and we’ll talk of it to-morrow morning.”

“It’s a tremendous fluke,” said Mr. Simmel, as he leisurely undressed himself; “but it will serve my purpose admirably. That eight hundred pounds of mine lent to Master Charley looks much less shaky than it did, and what a trump-card to play with Kate!”

CHAPTER XXII.

MR. SIMNEL AT THE DEN.

Two days after the events recorded in the last chapter, Mr. Simnel left the Tin-Tax Office a couple of hours earlier than his usual time of departure, and taking a cab, hurried off to his apartments in Piccadilly. Overlooking the Green Park, sufficiently lofty to be removed from the immediate noise of the traffic, and situate in that part of the street which was macadamised, there were, perhaps, no more delightful chambers in town than those occupied by the Tin-Tax secretary. They consisted but of three rooms—sitting-room, bed-chamber, and bath-room; but all were lofty and well-proportioned, and were furnished in a thoroughly luxurious manner. A big bookcase, with its contents admirably selected, covered one side of the sitting-room, on the walls of which hung Raphael Morghen prints, and before-letter proofs after Landseer, Leslie, and Stanfield; a round table, over which were suspended three swinging moderator-lamps, with white-china shades and crimson-silk fringe; a sofa and numerous easy-chairs, all in crimson velvet and walnut-wood; rich spoils of Bohemian glass, standing in odd corners on quaint oak cabinets; two Sèvres china dogs, in begging attitude, mounting guard on either end of the mantelshelf; and a flying female figure suspended across the looking-glass;—such were among the incongruous contents of the room. On the table, two yellow-paper covered French novels, a Horace, and M'Culloch's Commercial Directory lay side by side; in the looking-glass, cards for evening-parties and dinners were jostled by tickets soliciting vote and interest in approaching elections of charitable societies, re-

mindings of gatherings of learned bodies, and small bills for books or boots. It was Mr. Simmel's pleasure to keep up this *mélange*; his time was generally fully occupied; he chose people to consider that he had not a moment to himself; he wished those who called on him on business to see the invitations, in order that they might judge therefrom of his position in society; and he took care that the attention of those idle droppers-in, who came on a Sunday morning, for instance, or late at night, to have a chat, should be directed to the business-cards, to give them a notion of his standing in the money-making, business world. Since Mr. Simmel assumed the reins at the Tin-Tax Office, two or three hundred men had sat with their legs under that round table, discussing an excellent dinner, and meeting pleasant people; but not one of them had ever left the room without Mr. Simmel's feeling that his coming had been productive of benefit to his host, and that the invitation had fully answered its intent. Baron Oppenhardt, the great financier, never could tell what made him accept Simmel's invitation, save that he knew his host was connected with Government and had a long head of his own; yet he never refused. And little Blurt, whose "connexion with the press" was of a limited nature, never could understand why, biennially, he sat under those shaded moderator-lamps in Piccadilly, and consumed Pommery Greno out of bell-shaped glasses. But Simmel knew why he had them to dinner, and took their value out of both Oppenhardt and Blurt.

A long-headed man, Mr. Simmel, and, to judge from the strange smile on his face on that particular day, full of some special scheme, as he emerged from his bedroom and looked out into Piccadilly. Any thing but a vain man, and long past the age when the decoration of one's person enters largely into account, Mr. Simmel had yet paid special attention to his toilette during the short interval which had elapsed since his arrival at home from the Tin-Tax Office. He was got up with elaborate care and yet perfect simplicity; indeed, there was a touch of the old school in his drab riding-trousers, white waistcoat,

blue cut-away coat, and blue bird's-eye neckerchief, with small stand-up collars. A glance into the street showed him that his horses were ready, and he descended at once. At the door he found his groom mounted on a knowing-looking gray cob, short, stiff, and sturdy, and leading a splendid thoroughbred bright bay with black points. This Mr. Simnel mounted and rode easily away.

Through Decimus Burton's archway he turned into Hyde Park and made at once for the Row. There were but few men lounging about there at that time of the year, but Simnel was known to some of them; and after nods had been exchanged, they fell to comparing notes about him and his horse and his style of living, wondering how it was done, admiring his cleverness, detracting from his position—talking, in fact, as men will do of another who has beat them in this grand struggle for place which we call life. The Row was very empty, and Simnel paid but little attention to its occupants: now and then he occasionally raised his whip mechanically in acknowledgment of some passing salute, but it is to be doubted whether he knew to whom he was telegraphing, as his thoughts were entirely fixed on his mission. However, he wore a pleasant smile on his face, and that was quite enough: grinning, like charity, covers a multitude of sins; and if you only smile and hold your tongue, you can pass through life with an *éclat* which excellent eloquence, combined with a serious face, would fail to give. So Mr. Simnel went smiling along at the easiest amble until he got clear of the Row and the town, and then he gave the bay his head, and never drew rein until he turned up a country lane immediately on passing Ealing Common.

Half way up this lane stood The Den, and evidences of Kate Mellon's calling began to abound so soon as you turned out of the high-road. In the fields on either side through the bare hedges one could see a string of horses in cloths and head-pieces, each ridden by a groom, skirt-ing the hedges along which a proper riding-path had been made; occasionally a yellow break, driven by a

veteran coachman, with a younger and more active coadjutor perched up behind, and standing with his eyes on a level with the coach-box observing every motion of the horses, would rumble by, while the clay-coloured gig containing Mr. Sanderack the veterinary surgeon, who, in his long white cravat, beard, and tight trousers, looked a pleasant compound of a dissenting-minister, a horse-jockey, and an analytical chemist, was flying in and out of the lane at all times and seasons. Mr. Simnel seemed accustomed to these scenes and thoroughly well known amongst them, the grooms and breaksmen touched their hats to him, and he exchanged salutations with Mr. Sanderack, and told him that the bay had got rid of all his wind-galls and never went better in his life. So straight up the lane until he arrived at the lodge, and then, before his groom could ride up, his cheery cry of "Gate!" brought out the buxom lodge-keeper, and she also greeted Mr. Simnel with a curtsy of recognition, and received his largesse as he rode through; so down the little carriage-drive, past the pigeon-house elevated on a pole, and the pointers' kennels, and the strip of garden cultivated by the lodge-keeper, and in which one of the lodge-keeper's dirty chubby children was always sprawling; past the inner gates, through which could be caught glimpses of the circular straw-ride, and the stable and loose boxes, and the neatly gravelled court-yard, up the sweep and so to the house-door. Freeman, the staid stud-groom from Yorkshire, had seen the visitor's entry from the stable, where he was superintending, and hurried up to meet him. Before Mr. Simnel's own groom had come alongside, Freeman was at his horse's head.

"Mornin', sir," said he, touching his hat. "Missis is oop at Fouracres, close by, givin' lesson to a young leddy, just by t' water soide: joompin' brook, oi think. Howsever she'll be in d'rackly, oi know."

"All right, Freeman," said Mr. Simnel, leisurely dismounting. "Horses all well? Fine weather for horse-flesh, this!"

"Ay, ay, it be, sir!" said the old man. "Stood be

pratty well, oï'm thinkin': coughs and colds, and that loike, as is allays case this toime o' year."

"Don't hurry Miss Mellon on my account, Freeman," said Mr. Simnel; "I can wait. I'll go into the house, and you can let her know that I'm here, when she comes in. By the way, Freeman, I haven't seen you since Christmas: here's for old acquaintance' sake."

Freeman touched his hat gratefully, but not submissively, as he pocketed the half-sovereign which Mr. Simnel slipped into his capacious palm, and moved off towards the stables with the groom and the horses.

"Good man, that," said Simnel to himself, as he went into the house. "Straightforward, conscientious sort of fellow, and thoroughly devoted to *her*. Proper style of man to have in an establishment: thoroughly respectable—do one credit by his looks. If it ever comes off, I certainly should keep Mr. Freeman on."

Mr. Simnel passed on into the long low dining-room, where he found the table spread for luncheon, with a very substantial display of cold roast beef, fowls, and tongue, sherry, and a tall bottle of German wine. He smiled as he noticed these preparations, and then leisurely walked round the room. He paused at an oil-painting of Kate with a favourite horse by her side. The artist evidently knew much more about the equine than the human race. The horse's portrait was admirable, but poor Kitty, with vermilion cheeks and glaring red hair, and a blue habit with long daubs of light in it, like rain-streaks on a window, was a lamentable object to look on. Only one other picture decorated the walls, a portrait of the Right Hon. the Earl of Quorn, aged 61, founder of the Society for the Relief of Incapacitated Joinmasters and Horse-dealers, dedicated to him by his faithful servants the publishers; representing a hale old gentleman, remarkable principally for his extraordinary length of check-neckcloth, seated on a weight-carrying cob, and staring intently at nothing. On a side-table lay a thick book, *Youatt on the Horse*, and a thin pamphlet, *Navicular not Incurable*, a *Little Warbler* (poor

Kitty!), and a kind of album, into which a heterogeneous mixture of recipes for horse-medicines, scraps of hunting news, lists of prices fetched at the sales of celebrated studs, and other sporting memoranda had been pasted. Simnel was looking through this, and had just come upon a slip of printed matter, evidently cut from a newspaper, announcing the appointment of Mr. Charles Beresford to be a commissioner of the Tin-Tax Office, in place of Cockle pensioned—a slip against which there were three huge deep pencil-scorings—when the door opened and his hostess entered.

Although her habit was draggled and splashed, and her hair disarranged and blown about her face, Kate Mellon never had looked, to Simnel's eyes at least, more thoroughly charming than she did at that instant. The exercise she had just gone through had given her a splendid colour, her eyes were bright and sparkling, her whole frame showed to perfection in the tight-fitting jacket; and as she came into the room and removed her hat, the knot of hair behind, loosened from the comb, fell over her shoulders in golden profusion. She wound it up at once with one hand, advancing with the other outstretched to her guest.

"Sorry I'm late, Simnel," said she; "but I had a ~~part~~ here, and business is business, as you know well enough. Can't afford to throw away any chance, so I gave her her hour, and now she's off, and I am all the better by a guinea. I didn't stop to change my habit because I heard you were waiting, and I knew you wouldn't mind."

"You couldn't look more enchanting than you do now, Kate," said Simnel.

"Yes, yes; I know," said Kitty; "all right! But I thought you knew better than that. This is the wrong shop for flummery of that sort, as you ought to have learnt by this time. Have some lunch?"

They sat down to the table, and during the meal talked on ordinary subjects; for the most part discussing their common acquaintance, but always carefully avoid-

ing bringing Beresford's name forward. When they had finished, Kate said, "You want to smoke, of course. I think I shall have a puff myself. No, thank you; your weeds are too big for me; I've got some Queens here that old Sir John Elle sent me after I broke that roan mare for his daughter. By George, what a brute that was! nearly killed me at first, she did; and now you might ride her with a pack-thread."

Simnel did not reply. Kate Mellon curled herself up on an ottoman in the window with her habit tucked round her; lit a small cigar; and slowly expelling the smoke said, as the blue vapour curled round her head, "And now to business! You wanted to talk to me, you said; and I told you to come up to-day. What's it all about?"

"About yourself, Kate. You know thoroughly well my feelings to you; you know how often I have—"

"Hold on a minute!" said Kate; "I know that you've been philandering and hanging on about me,—or would have been, if I'd have let you,—for this year past. I know that well enough; but I thought there was to be none of this. I thought I'd told you to drop that subject, and that you'd consented to drop it. I told you I wouldn't listen to you, and—"

"Why would not you listen to me, Kate?" said Simnel earnestly.

"Why? Because—"

"Don't trouble yourself to find an excuse; I'll tell you why," said Simnel. "Because you were desperately bent on a fruitless errand; because you were beating the wind and trying to check the storm; because you were in love,—I must speak plainly, Kitty, in a matter like this,—in love with a man who did not return your feeling, and who even now is boasting of your passion, and laughing at you as its dupe!"

"What!" cried the girl, throwing away the cigar and starting to her feet.

"Sit down, child," said Simnel, gently laying his hand on her arm; "sit down, and hear me out. I know

your pluck and spirit; and nothing grieves me more, or goes more against the grain with me, than to have to tell you this. But when I tell you that the man to whom you so attached yourself has spoken lightly and sneeringly of your infatuation; that amongst his friends he has laughingly talked of a scene which occurred on the last occasion of his visit to this house, when you suggested that he should marry you—

"Did he say that?" asked the girl, pushing her hair back from her face,—“did he say that?”

"That and more; laughed at the notion, and—"

"O my God!" shrieked Kate Mellon, throwing up her arms. "Spare me! stop, for Heaven's sake, and don't let me hear any more. Did he say that of me? Then they'll all know it, and when I meet them will grin and whisper as I know they do. Haven't I heard them do it of others a thousand times? and now to think they'll have the pull of me. O good Lord, good Lord!" and she burst into tears and buried her face in her handkerchief. Then suddenly rousing, she exclaimed: "What do you come and tell me this for, Simmel? What business is it of yours? What's your motive in coming and smashing me up like this?"

"One, and one only," said Simmel in a low voice. "I wanted to prevent your demeaning yourself by ever showing favour to a man who has treated you so basely. I wanted you to show your own pride and spirit by blotting this Beresford from your thoughts. I wanted you to do this—whatever may be the result—because—I love you, Kate!"

"That's it!" she cried suddenly—"that's it! You're telling me lies and long stories, and breaking my heart, and making me make a fool of myself, only that you may stand well with me and get me to like you! How do I know what you say is true? Why should Charley do this? Why did Charley refuse what I offered him? I meant it honestly enough, God knows. Oh, why did he refuse it?" and again she burst into tears.

"Oh, he did refuse it?" said Simmel, quietly. "So

far, then, you see I am right; and you will find I am right throughout. I'll tell you why he acted as he did to you. Because he's full of family pride, and because he never cared for you one rush. At this very moment he is desperately in love with a married woman, and is only awaiting her husband's death to make her his wife!"

"Can you prove that?" asked Kate eagerly.

"I can! you shall have ample opportunity of satisfying yourself—"

"Does the husband suspect?"

"Not in the least."

"That's right!" said the girl with sudden energy—"that'll do! Only let me prove that, and I'll give him up for ever."

"If I do this for you, Kitty, surely my love will be sufficiently proved. You will then—"

"Yes, we'll talk of that afterwards. I'll see you next week, and you'll tell me more of this new love-affair of—of *his*! Don't stop now. I'm all out of sorts. You've upset me. I wasn't in condition. I've been doing a little too much work lately. Go now, there's a good fellow! Good-by." Then stopping suddenly—"You're sure you're not selling me, Simnel?"

"I swear it!" said Simnel.

"I wish to heaven you had been," said the poor girl; "but we'll see about the new business next week. I think we'll spoil that pretty game between us, eh? There, good-by." And she set her teeth tight, and rushed from the room.

"So far so good," said Mr. Simnel, as he rode quietly home. "She's taken it almost a little too strongly. My plan now is to soften her and turn her to me. I think I have a card in my hand that will win that trick, and then—the game's my own!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

MR. BERESFORD IN PURSUIT.

THE idea suggested by Simmel, after the interview with Dr. Prater at the Flybynights, came upon Mr. Beresford with extraordinary force. It opened up to him a new train of thought, gave a complete turn to his intended course of life, afforded him matter for the deepest study and reflection. As we have already seen, he was a man with a faultless digestion, and without a scrap of heart—two qualities which had undoubtedly greatly conduced towards his success in life, and towards making him a careless, easy-going worldly philosopher. When he first saw Miss Townshend at Bissett Grange, he remembered her as a cheery little flirt whom he had met during the previous season; and finding her companionable and amusing, determined to carry on a flirtation which should serve as a pastime, and, at the break-up of the party, be consigned to that limbo already replete with similar *amourettes*. The presence of Captain Lyster, and the unmistakable evidence of his passion for the young lady, gave Mr. Beresford very little annoyance; he had a notion that, save in very exceptional cases, of which indeed he had had no experience, women had a horror of an earnest lover; that watchings and waitings, hangings on words, deep gazings into eyes, and all outward signs of that passion which induces melancholy and affords themes for poets, were as much *rococo* and out of date as carrying a lady's glove in your hat and perpetually seeking a fight with some one on her account. He thought that women hated "dreary" lovers, and were far more likely to be won by rattle, laughter, and raillery than

by the deepest devotion of a silent and sighing order. Moreover, as he was only going in for flirtation, he would make his running while it lasted, and leave the Captain to come in with the weight-carrying proprieties after he had gone.

So far at first. Then came the recollection of his straitened position, the reflection that Miss Townshend was an heiress, and the determination to go in seriously for a proposal—a determination which was very short-lived, owing to the discovery of the lady's engagement to Gustav Schröder. From the time of her marriage, Mrs. Schröder was by Beresford mentally relegated to a corps which included several married ladies of his acquaintance; for the most part young and pretty women, whose husbands were either elderly, or immersed in business, or, what was equally available, immersed in pleasure, and more attentive to other men's wives than to their own; ladies who required "notice," as they phrased it, and who were sufficiently good-looking to command it from some men, between whom and themselves there existed a certain understanding. Nothing criminal, nor approaching to criminality; for despite the revelations of the Divorce Court, there is, I take it, a something, whether it be in what is called our phlegmatic temperament, whether it be in the bringing-up of our English girls,—bringing-up of domesticity utterly unknown to Continental-bred young ladies, which hallows and keeps constantly present the image of the doting father and the tender mother, and all the sacred home-associations,—a something which strengthens the weak and arrests the hand of the spoiler, and leaves the sacrifice incomplete. The necessity for "notice," or for "being understood," or "for having some one to rely on" (the husband engaged in business or in the House being, of course, utterly untrustworthy), has created a kind of society which I can only describe as a kind of solid bread-and-butter *demi-monde*—a *demi-monde* which, as compared with that state of existence known in France under the title, is as a club to a tavern, where the same

things are carried on, but in a far more genteel and decorous manner. The relations of its different members to each other are as free from Wertherian sentimentalism as they are from Parisian license, and would probably be considered severely correct by that circle of upper Bohemians, of whose lives the younger Dumas has constituted himself the chronicler.

Having, then, mentally appointed Mrs. Schröder a member of this society, Mr. Beresford took upon himself the office of her cavalier, and behaved to her in due form. When they were in company together, he sedulously kept his eyes upon her, strove to anticipate her wishes, and let her see that it was she who entirely absorbed him; he always dropped his voice when he spoke to her, even though it were about the merest trifle; and he invariably took notice of the arrangements of her dress, hair, and appearance in general, and made suggestions which, being in excellent taste, were generally approved and carried out. Then he found out Mrs. Schröder's romantic side, a little bit of nineteenth-century sentiment, dashed with drawing-room cynicism, which found its exponent in Mr. Owen Meredith's weaker verses; and there they found plenty of quotations about not being understood, and the "little look across the crowd," and "what is not, might have been," and other choice little sentiments, which did not tend to elevate Mr. Gustav Schröder, then hard at work in the City, in his wife's good opinion. Indeed, being a very weak little woman, with a parasitical tendency to cling for support to something, and being without that something, which she had hitherto found in Barbara, free from the dread which her father's presence always imposed upon her, and having no companion in her husband, Mrs. Schröder began to look forward with more and more eagerness to her opportunities of meeting Charles Beresford, to take greater and greater delight in his attentions and his conversation, and to substitute a growing repugnance for her hitherto passive endurance of Mr. Schröder. Charles Beresford was gradually coming to occupy the principal

position in her thoughts, and this that gentleman perceived with mingled feelings of gratified vanity and annoyance. "She's going a little too fast!" he had said to himself; "this sort of thing is all very well; but she's making it a mile too palpable! People will talk, and I'm not in a position to stand any public scandal; and as for bolting, or any thing of that sort, by Jove, it would be sheer ruin and nothing less." In this frame of mind, it had more than once occurred to Mr. Beresford to speak to Mrs. Schröder, and caution her as to her bearing towards him; but fortunately for him, so thoroughly void of offence had been all their relations hitherto, that he scarcely dared to hint at what he intended to convey, without risking the accusation of imputing evil by his very advice. And in the mean time, while he hesitated what course to take, came Dr. Prater's information, which at once changed all his plans.

The day after the conversation at the Flybynights, Mr. Beresford left town and remained away for a week. The first day after his return, he went into Mr. Simmel's room at the Office, and found that gentleman as usual surrounded with work. Contrary, however, to his general custom, Simmel no sooner looked up and saw Beresford than he threw down the pen which he was plying, rose, and advancing shook his friend heartily by the hand.

"Glad to see you back, Charley!" he said: "I was afraid you were off for a ramble by your leaving no message and no address. Some of the old games, eh? You must give them up now, Master Charley, and live circumspectly; by Jove, you must."

"Nothing of the sort," replied Beresford. "Gayford, who was chief here before Maddox, was an old friend of our family; and he's ill, poor old boy, so I went out of charity to stay with him. He's got a place at Berkhamstead, and there's deuced good hunting-country round there. I had three capital days; Gayford's daughters were out; clipping riders, those girls; good as Kate Mellon any day!"

"Indeed!" said Mr. Simnel, wincing a little at the name: "I should think flirting with any body's daughters, be they ever so 'clipping,' as you call it, would be time wasted for you just now, wouldn't it?"

"What do you mean?" asked Beresford, knowing perfectly, but anxious that the declaration should come from his companion.

"Mean!" said Simnel, somewhat savagely. "What am I likely to mean? That you ought to stick to your duties here and earn your salary; that Sir Hickory has heard that you go to the Argyle Rooms, and is going to speak to Lord Palmerston about it; that you're hurting your health or spoiling your complexion by keeping late hours,—is that why I'm likely to tell you to live circumspectly? What rubbish it is fencing with me in this way! You know that the last time we met was at that night-club of yours; that we had a talk there with Dr. Prater; and that you determined—"

"I know," interrupted Beresford with a start—"I know," he continued, looking round, "I'm not over particular; but I confess this plotting for a dead man's shoes seems to me infernal rascality."

"What do you mean by 'plotting,' Charles Beresford? *I* am plotting for no dead man's shoes. *I* have no hope of marrying a pretty widow, and having a splendid income; and as for rascality—"

"There, I didn't mean it; I only thought—"

"Nor, on the other hand," pursued Mr. Simnel, relentlessly, "am *I* over head and ears in debt, pressed by Jews, horribly impecunious, and—"

"Leave me alone, Simnel, can't you? I know all this; and as you must be perfectly certain, I've turned this Schröder affair over in my mind a hundred times already."

"And what have you decided?"

"To go in for it at all hazards."

"I think you're right," said Simnel quietly; "it seems to me your last chance; and though it's not strictly a very nice business, there are hundreds of men holding their heads up before the world, which very much esteems

them, who have made their money in far worse transactions. You'll require an immense amount of patience and tact."

"The former undoubtedly. Prater said he might go at any moment if—what was it?—any thing excited or annoyed him. Question is what does excite a fellow of that sort—Muscovadoes being high, or gray-shirtings scarce, or pig-iron in demand, or some of those things one sees in the paper—banks breaking or stocks falling, eh? As for the tact, I don't think that will be required now."

"How do you mean—*now*?"

"Because it's all squared already," said Beresford complacently. "I've only to go in and win whenever I like, I imagine. To tell the truth—though a man doesn't talk of these things, of course—I've been fighting shy of it lately, rather than pressing it on."

"Yes, yes, of course," said Simmel impatiently; "I know all about that; but don't you see that the greatest tact will be required because your plan of operations must be entirely changed? You have been carrying on a very animated flirtation within certain limits; but now you are going in for a totally different thing. You are going in—sit down, and let us talk this over quietly, it's rather important: I know you've great experience in such matters; but just listen to my humble advice, it may be worth hearing,—you are going in to make sure of marrying a woman after her husband's death; an event likely to occur at any time. To insure success there are two ways—one by compromising her—"

"By Jove, Simmel!" exclaimed Beresford through his shut teeth.

"Be quiet, and don't interrupt—I'm not going to brush the down off your virtue! As I said, by compromising her, by which you gain a hold upon her which she cannot shake off, and must always acknowledge and bow to, when required. But this, besides being wrong and unjust, and all that sort of thing—which I don't so much mind—is risky, which I dislike; and if detected,

brings the whole fabric to the ground. So we may put that on one side,"

"Ah!" said Beresford, with a sigh of relief; "and the other?"

"The other is a totally different method, and unlike any thing you have ever tried, I suspect, with any one. It is simply by professing hopeless, unswerving, unconquerable spooniness. You have hitherto—pardon the question—merely looked and sighed, &c.? Ah, I thought so; that gesture was quite satisfactory as to the amount of tenderness. Well now, then, you must declare yourself. Quietly, of course, and, if you please, without any manifestations, which would entirely spoil our plan, the essence whereof is virtue. You declare yourself to this effect: that you are so completely smitten that you can keep silence no longer; that previous to going away for a lengthened period (for you believe that expatriation is the only thing that will afford temporary relief), you have determined on speaking to her, fearing she might think your absence strange, or hear its cause wrongly explained by somebody else; that yours is not like the feeble sentiment of the butterflies who flutter around her, &c. &c.; but a deep and steadfast passion, which will only cease with life. You know all that business. Then, that your respect for her is so great, that you will not give scandal the smallest chance of a whisper. Had you met in happier times—oh! you did, eh? Well, then, had you been in a position, when you first met, to have offered, &c.; but now, too late! love for ever; but leave for ever—foreign climes."

"Yes; but you know well enough I can't go abroad, and—"

"My dear fellow, she'll never dream of your doing any thing of the sort. If I've any knowledge of women, she'll be deeply affected, as she ought to be, by your deucedly romantic story. She'll say a good deal about 'if,' in reference to former years; she'll state her full determination to do nothing approaching the smallest shadow of wrong; but she'll avow she should be miserable at the

idea of being the cause of your banishment, and therefore she'll entreat you to stop in England and be her brother."

"Be her brother?"

"Ay, and a first-rate position you'll have of it as her brother. There'll be an immense amount of sentiment in the connexion; she'll defer to you in every thing; your presence will always keep every body else off, and she'll never dream of carrying on with any one but you. How could she expect again to meet with such delicacy as you've shown? And if any thing *should* happen, you're safe to be first in the field and to carry off the cup. Now do you see the line of country?"

"Oh, yes, I see it fast enough, and I've no doubt I can manage it. It's rather a duffing business altogether; however, needs must, and I musn't risk any more flukes. One thing I *am* curious about, Simmel."

"What's that?"

"Why *you* take such an interest in this business? You first put me on to it, and you've evidently given it some of your precious time in thinking it out while I've been away. Be frank for once in your life, and say—"

"Why does it interest *me*?" said Simmel, nursing his leg, and giving a grin which showed all his big teeth. "Well, Master Charley, your memory has never been good, but you might occasionally recollect that you owe me eight hundred pounds!"

"Yes," said Beresford, "I know that well enough; but it isn't for that alone. You'll be safe to get that, if I marry and come into money; but there's something more in it than that, I know. It's that business with the name of that firm that you made me say to old Townshend, isn't it now, eh?"

"What, Pigott and Wells!" said Simmel, rocking to and fro—"Pigott and Wells of Combeardingham? Well, perhaps that has something to do with it; who knows? Meantime, stick to what I've told you; begin at once, and in a month's time come to me with a good report."

And so ended the colloquy between this precious pair.

* * * *

Pursuing his instructions with a certain amount of relish, and all the experience of an accomplished and versatile actor, Mr. Beresford threw himself into his new character with spirit, and made a decided hit in it. All the raillery and nonsense, all the smiles and laughter, had vanished. Owen Meredith had been exchanged for Lord Byron; and Mr. Beresford as a nineteenth-century London-made Giaour was doing terrible execution to that feeble little bit of Mrs. Schröder's anatomy which she called her heart. There was no one to say a kind word, to give proper advice, to the poor little woman in her need. Barbara was absolutely lost to her: she had been two or three times to Great Adullam Street, and Barbara had returned the call; but there was evident restraint on both sides. The outside show of friendship remained, but there was no animating spirit; none such, at least, as to call for the kind of confidence which Alice Schröder would gladly have made, had she received the slightest invitation. But Barbara was not the Barbara of old days: she looked worn and anxious, was constantly pre-occupied, and answered at random; she confined herself, moreover, to the merest commonplaces in her conversation, so that Alice got no help from her. Nor from her father had she any supervision: strict to a fault before her marriage, Mr. Townshend, having once settled his daughter, imagined that his duty in life was done, and that henceforth he might devote himself entirely to pleasure, consisting in haunting the City by day and the whist-tables at the Travellers by night. And it began to be noticed that this hitherto model British merchant drank a great deal of wine with his dinner, and a great deal of brandy afterwards; and there were ugly rumours running about 'Charles and drifting through Garraway's; and Townshend's clerks were rather in request at the Bay Tree, and were manifestly pumped as to whether there was any thing wrong with their governor, under the guise of being requested to "put a name" to what they would like to drink. It may be imagined, therefore, that under this state of circumstances Mr. Towns-

hend had neither time nor inclination to bestow any advice upon that daughter, who, as he was in the habit of saying, "had made such a splendid alliance." With her husband Alice had, as has before been said, nothing in common. He was a cold, proud, well-meaning man, who g'oried as much as a white-blooded elderly person can be said to glory in his riches and his state, and who liked to have a pretty, elegant, well-dressed woman before him at table, in the same way that he liked to have a stout big-whiskered butler in a white waistcoat behind him. He liked his wife, when he had time to think about her; but he had been brought up in business, and that absorbed his whole attention by day; while giving or going to parties, in which he could spend the result of what he had attained by business, occupied him at night. But he had the highest opinion of Mrs. Schröder's conduct, which he imagined was on a par with every thing else in the establishment—real and genuine; and he paid her bills, and presented her with cheques, with lavish generosity. Only he was not exactly the man on whose bosom a wife could lay her head and confess that she was tempted beyond her strength.

There was a man who, without being much mixed up with this little episode in the great drama of human life, overlooked some of the scenes, and saw the dangers to which one of the characters was rapidly exposing herself. That man was Fred Lyster, the one sentiment of whose life—his love for Alice Townshend—was as fresh and as green and as pure as ever. The announcement of her engagement was a great shock to him, and he had taken care only to meet her face to face once or twice since her marriage. The meeting upset him; and though she was apparently unconscious of any feeling in the matter, it did her no good; and there was no earthly reason why it should be. But he went every where where she went, and watched her in the distance; his ears were always on the alert whenever her name was mentioned in club smoke-rooms and such-like haunts of gossip; and he found, as he had dreaded with fatal prescience, at Bis-

sett, that Beresford was on the trail. Long and earnestly he deliberated with himself as to what course he should pursue. Should he pick a quarrel on some other topic with Beresford, and shoot him? Shooting had gone out of fashion; and if he killed his man, he should be exiled from England; if he didn't kill him, where was the use of challenging him? Should he speak to Mr. Townshend? or was there no female friend to whom he could apply? Yes; Barbara Churchill. In Barbara Churchill he had the greatest confidence, and to her he would go at once.

CHAPTER XXIV.

BARBARA'S FIRST LESSON IN THE MANEGE.

For some few months after the events just described, the lives of those who form the characters of this little drama passed evenly on without the occurrence of any circumstance worthy of special record on the part of their historian. Mr. Beresford, implicitly following Mr. Simmel's advice, proceeded to lay siege to Mrs. Schröder in the manner agreed upon, and found his advances received very much after the fashion predicted by his astute friend. In all child-like simplicity Mrs. Schröder firmly believed in the baneful influence which she had unconsciously exercised over her admirer, and strove to make him amends by a charitable and sentimental pity. She could perfectly appreciate all his feelings; for was not she herself misunderstood? had her girlhood's dream been realised? what was wealth, what was position, to her? was she not mated with one who, &c.? So she not merely permitted but encouraged Mr. Beresford's fraternal sentiments; though she by no means eschewed the world and its frivolity, and gave herself up to solitary romance. On the contrary, she went out a great deal into society, and had frequent receptions at home; Beresford being her constant but always unobtrusive companion. It is difficult to say what motive about this time prompted a considerable change in Mr. Schröder's manner towards his wife; but some such change undoubtedly took place. It may possibly have been that the insufficiency of money as a source of happiness may have dawned upon him, steeped as he was to his very lips in constantly-increasing wealth. It may have been

that he suddenly awoke to the fact that he was expected to lavish something more than generosity on the young girl whom he had made the head of his house, and who, as he thought, conducted herself with so much propriety. This new feeling may have had its germ one night when they were sitting in their grand-tier box at the Italian Opera, during the performance of *Der Freischütz*; and as the old familiar strains rang through the house, Gustav Schröder's memory travelled back for five-and-thirty years, and he saw himself a lad of seventeen, seated in the pit of a little German theatre by the side of a plump little girl, who wore a silver arrow through the great knot of her flaxen hair, and down whose cheeks tears were rolling as she listened to the recital of Agatha's woes. He had loved that plump little Käthen, loved her with a boy's pure and ardent passion; and when sent to his uncle's counting-house at Frankfort, they had parted with bitter tears, and with the exchange of very cheap and worthless love-tokens. He wondered what had become of that five-groschen piece with the hole drilled through it, and the bit of red ribbon. He wondered why he had never loved since those days. And then he looked up and saw his pretty, elegant little wife, whom every one admired and praised; and it flashed upon him that he had never tried to break through the outer crust of staid formality with which business and the world had covered him; and he determined to try to love and be loved once more. And so Mrs. Schröder, beginning to be dreadfully frightened at the incantation scene, was astonished to find her hand gently taken in her husband's, and on looking up to find his eyes fixed on hers. From that time out Gustav Schröder was a changed man; he took frequent holidays from business; he strove in every way to let his wife see how anxious he was for her happiness; and she saw it, and was to a certain extent touched by his conduct. It needed all Mr. Beresford's sophistry, all his attention and quotation, the employment of all the art in which he had been indoctrinated by his friend Simnel, to make head against

the influence which Gustav Schröder's quiet watchfulness and fatherly affection were attaining; for the affection was, after all, more fatherly than conjugal in its display. Mr. Schröder was far too much a man of the world to affect to ignore his age or the result of his life-habits; and no one was better pleased than he to see his wife happy among younger and livelier companions.

A happy influence properly exercised at this time would have been immediately beneficial to Alice Schröder, and have brought matters back into the right course. For instance, ten minutes' walk with Barbara Churchill would have settled the question; for Barbara was to Alice that one grand idol whom we all of us (although we change them at different periods of our lives) set up and worship. And Barbara had not derogated one whit from her high position in Alice's estimation by her marriage. It was exactly the thing that she imagined a girl of her friend's high spirit would do, if pressed to it; there was something romantic in it, savouring of the legends of the high dames of old, who gave themselves to poets after scorning kings; and the whole process entirely agreed with certain of the *dicta* of Mr. Owen Meredith, who, as has been explained, was poet-laureate at the Schröder court. And Alice called on Barbara, and petted her and praised her, and in her silly little way did every thing possible to prevent the smallest *rapprochement* between them. And then Alice went away, and cried in the carriage on her way home, and declared that Barbara was cruel and unkind and unjust, and had utterly changed in every thing.

Were these assertions correct? I fear that at all events they had a certain proportion of truth. The spirit which had induced Barbara Lexden to marry a man without money, and of, as her friends thought, inferior position; which had made her scorn the threats of being cast off by those among whom her life had hitherto been placed, and to hold to one whom she knew but little, yet trusted much,—this same spirit made her brave the fate to which she had resigned herself, and

determined that if she repined, it should be in secret and unheard. It *was* a mistake; *that* she had already confessed to herself with bitter tears many and many a time; done in haste, repented at leisure—the old, old story, the old seductive myth, which will find believers for ever and aye. How often, brooding in the solitude of her chamber, had she gone over the whole business in her mind, linking bit to bit, and endeavouring to find out where the reality had fallen short of the anticipation!

They were poor. Well! had she not expected poverty; had not Frank told her plainly and honourably of his position before he made any declaration? Yes; but she did not understand poverty exactly as she had found it. She knew that they would not be able to give parties, nor to go to the Opera, nor that kind of thing; but she certainly thought that they would go out sometimes, and that she should not be stuck at home for ever. Of course the people who gave parties had a great deal of expense; but those who went to them had none; and it was not expected that any newly-married people living in a small way should entertain in return. But then Frank, after positively refusing to go out a third night running, had given way; but had shaken his head, and looked so serious over a glove-bill which he happened to see on her dressing-table, that she threw on her dressing-gown, and bade him go by himself. She did not care about going out; but if she went, she would be decent; she had always been considered to have a reputation for good taste, and nothing on earth should make her a dowdy now. She would sooner stay at home always; indeed there was little enough to go out for, having to be jolted in those horrible cabs, that crawled along the streets, with no room for one's dress, and with the certainty of being covered with dust or straw, or some dreadful stuff, when you got out; and then the insolence of the driver!

And her home? It was small, and dull, and dreary; but had she been led to anticipate any thing else? No; she supposed not. And yet she wore herself out in those gaunt dark rooms, and chafed in her prison like a bird

in its cage. She had always been a bad correspondent, and since her marriage had scarcely written any letters at all; but she would sit mooning over the pages of a novel, or over the stitches of her embroidery, until book or work would fall from her hand; and there she would remain, looking intently at nothing, staring vacantly before her. Frank caused her to be supplied regularly with a copy of the *Statesman*, and in it she tried to read his articles—an honest attempt in which she dismally failed. Her aunt had been somewhat of a keen politician, and Barbara was sufficiently well informed on the position of English parties to bear her share in a dinner-table dialogue; but foreign affairs principally occupied Frank's pen in the *Statesman*; and after an attempted course of reading about Moldo-Wallachia, Schleswig-Holstein, and the Principalities, including an immense amount of virtuous indignation, the reason for which she did not comprehend, and the object of which she could not make out, poor Barbara gave it up in despair. She was in the habit of glancing occasionally at that portion of the paper in which Mr. Henchman chronicled the doings of the fashionable world, and recorded the names of those present at great entertainments; and sometimes when Barbara would raise her eyes from the paper and look down the hot vista of frowning houses in Great Adullam Street, where dust and straw were blowing in a penetrating cloud, and whence the dismal howling of itinerant hucksters fell upon the ear, she, remembering what part she had recently played among those of whom she had been reading, and contrasting it with her then life, would bite her lip until the blood started, and sob bitterly.

Where was her spirit, do you ask? Has she not been represented as a girl of special spirit and pluck? Did not the early-narrated incidents of her career, her very marriage, prove this? and is it natural that she should break down before petty annoyances such as these? These questions have been asked; and all I can reply is, that I paint according to my lights and to my experience of life; and I believe that there are hundreds of women of

spirit who would bear the amputation of a finger with more fortitude than the non-arrival of a bonnet, and who suffer less in separation from those they dearly love than in the necessity for a daily inspection of the bread-pan.

And Frank, what of him? Had Barbara been deceived in him? had she misjudged his heart, his truth, his love? Not one whit; and yet how different he seemed! Throughout his life, Frank Churchill had acted on impulse, and had generally pulled through with extraordinary success. We have seen how, in the railway-journey back to Bissett, he had argued with himself, had persuaded himself into the determination of leaving the place and flying from temptation, and how on the impulse of a moment he settled the career of his life. To say he had repented of that step, would have been untrue; equally false would it have been to say that he had not been seriously disappointed in its result. The great charm of Barbara Lexden in his eyes had been her dissimilarity from other women. In the quiet circles in which he moved, there was no one kin to her; she stood out in bold relief among the fussy wives and meek colourless daughters of his friends, seeming a being of another sphere. And now, strange to say, this very contrast which had so captivated him, was his bane. What though the wives were fussy; they attended to their households with the utmost regularity, investigating the smallest matters of domestic detail, keeping down expenses here, making shift there, and having a comfortable home ready for their husbands wearied out with their work. What though the daughters were meek and colourless, without a fragment of taste in dress, without a spark of spirit, without one atom of dash; they were ready to strum the piano, or to play endless games of whist or picquet, when called upon, to enjoy thoroughly such little society as they had among themselves, and, in fact, to make themselves generally amiable. "Their girls did not lollop on the sofa and read trashy novels all day long, my dear!" as Mrs. Harding more than once remarked; "they were not aristocrats, and couldn't jabber Italian;

but they didn't lie in bed to breakfast, or be always fiddling with their hair, or dressing or undressing themselves twenty times a day. If those were aristocratic manners, the less she had of them the better."

All this talk, and there was much of it perpetually current, reached Frank Churchill's ears through his mother, and if it did not render him actually unhappy, at least dashed his spirits and checked his joys. He would sit for hours pondering over these things, thinking of his past, when he had only himself and his old mother to care for, wondering what would have been his future, supposing he had married one of the daughters of Mesopotamia, and settled down into the snug humdrum life pursued by those colonists. And then sometimes Barbara would break in upon his reverie, and, looking so brilliantly handsome, would come up and kiss his forehead, and say a few loving words untinged by regret or complaint; and he would rejoice in the choice he had made, and thank that fortune which had thrown such a treasure in his way.

There is no doubt that, without in the least degree intending it (indeed, what sacrifice had she not made, would she not make, for her son?), old Mrs. Churchill was a fruitful cause of the petty dissensions which took place between Barbara and her husband. Devoted to Frank, to her natural anxiety for his happiness was superadded an invincible jealousy of the woman who had supplanted his mother in his regard, or at least had pushed her from the highest position therein. Against the actuations of this feeling the old lady strove with all her strength, and made great way; but, like many other intending victors, she imagined the day gained before the enemy had been thoroughly repulsed, and then, neglecting her outposts, laid herself open to an irresistible attack. At first Frank laughed away all these remarks, telling his mother that the difference of age between her and Barbara, the difference of their lives and bringing up, the difference in the style of the present time and the days when Mrs. Churchill lived in the world, caused her to think the young wife's proceedings singular, and

her demeanour odd. But *sæpe cadendo*, by constant trituration the old lady's notions got grafted into his brain, and most of the weary self-communings and self-torturings which Frank had, sprung from his mother's unintentional planting.

One day about noon old Mrs. Churchill knocked at the door of Frank's little study, and entering found her son hard at work on an article he was preparing for a review. The old lady seemed in great spirits, kissed her son most affectionately, and said: "Busy as ever, Frank my darling? As I often used to say, you'll grow to your desk one day, you stick at it so—at least you used to when I lived with you; I don't know much of what you do now;" and she gave a little sigh, made doubly apparent by an attempt to stifle it, as she sat down.

"Why, mum, what nonsense!" said Frank; "you see as much of me as any body now—as much as Barbara, at all events."

"Oh, by the way, how is Barbara?"

"Well, not very brilliant this morning; she's got one of her headaches, and I persuaded her to breakfast in bed."

"Ah, she didn't take much persuading, I fancy. The young girls nowadays are very different from what I remember them; but she'd be tired, poor child, waiting up for you last night."

"She did no such thing, I'm delighted to say," said Frank, smiling, "as I had to write upon the result of the debate, and didn't get home until nearly three o'clock. Poor Barbara was sound asleep at that time, and had been so for some hours."

"Ah, ever since her visitor went away, I suppose?"

"Her visitor? What visitor?"

"Didn't she tell you? How odd! I called in last evening for a volume of *Blunt on the Pentateuch*, and found Captain Lyster here chatting. How odd that Barbara didn't mention it!"

"She was too sleepy both last night and this morning, I imagine," said Frank: "she has frequently told me of his visits."

"Oh, yes, he calls here very often."

"He's a very pleasant fellow," said Frank.

"Is he?" said the old lady, in rather acrid tones. "I didn't think you knew him."

"Not know him!" exclaimed Frank; "why, mother dear, how on earth should he call here if I didn't know him?"

"He might be a friend of your wife's, my dear."

"But my wife's friends are mine, are they not?"

"It does not always follow, Frank," said the old lady calmly; "besides, I thought if he had been a friend of yours, he would have called *sometimes* when you were at home."

Frank looked up quickly with a flushed face; then said, "What nonsense, mum! the man is an old friend of Barbara's, and comes at such times as are most convenient to himself. You don't understand the set of people he lives with, mum."

"Very likely not, my dear; and I'm sure I'm not sorry for it; for they seem strange enough; at least to a quiet old-fashioned body like myself, who was taught never to receive male friends when my husband—however, that's neither here nor there." And Mrs. Churchill bustled out.

When Barbara came down to luncheon, Frank said to her, "I hear you had Captain Lyster here, last night, Barbara."

"Oh, yes," she replied, "I forgot to tell you; he sat here some time."

"He comes pretty frequently, doesn't he?"

"I don't know," said Barbara, looking up; "I never counted the number of times; you always hear when he has been."

"I wish you'd do something for me, Barbara," said Frank.

"Well, what is it?"

"Just tell Lyster it would be better if he could contrive to call when I'm at home."

"Why?" asked Barbara pointedly.

“Why—well—upon my word—I scarcely know why—except that people talk, you know; and it’s better—eh? don’t you think?” stammered Frank. He had acted on impulse again, and felt confoundedly ashamed of himself.

“I distinctly decline to do any thing of the sort. I wonder, Frank, you’re not ashamed to propose such a thing to me; but I can see what influence has been at work.”

“There has been no influence at all; only I choose—”

“And *I* choose that you should find a fitter person than your wife to deliver insulting messages to your friends!”

“Barbara, suppose I were to insist upon your not receiving this man again?”

“You had better not, Frank,” said she, moving towards the door; “you don’t know whom you have to deal with.” And she swept out of the room.

And this was Barbara’s first lesson in the *manège*.

CHAPTER XXV.

A GARDEN-PARTY AT UPLANDS.

ALTHOUGH it was only in the first days of July, it had become thoroughly evident that the London season was on the wane. After a lengthened period of inaction, there had been a fierce parliamentary struggle brought about by that rising young gladiator Mr. Hope Ennythink, who had impeached the Prime Minister, brought the gravest charges against the Foreign Secretary, accused the Chancellor of the Exchequer of crass ignorance, and riddled with ridicule the incompetence of the First Lord of the Admiralty. As Mr. Hope Ennythink spoke with a certain amount of cleverness and a great amount of brass, as he was thoroughly up in all the facts which he adduced,—having devoted his life to the study of Hansard, and being a walking edition of that popular work,—and as he was warmly supported by the Opposition, whose great leaders thought highly of the young man, he ran the Government very hard, and gave the Treasury-whips a great deal of trouble to secure even the slight majority which pulled them through. But immediately the fight was over, it was evident that the session was on the point of closing. There was no more excitement; it was very hot weather; and the session and the season were simultaneously doomed. However, the wives and daughters of the members were determined to die hard; there would be at least a fortnight before the prorogation of Parliament, and during that fortnight dinners, balls, fêtes, and opera-visittings were carried on with redoubled activity. To a good many, condemned to autumnal pinchings and scrapings in a

dull country-house, it was the last taste of pleasure until next spring.

Upon the gentlemen attached to the room No. 120, in the Tin-Tax Office, the general state of affairs was not without its effect. Mr. Kinchenton was away for his holiday—he generally chose July as the best month for little Percy's sea-bathing—and he rung the changes between Worthing, Bognor, and Littlehampton, in one of which places he would be found in an entire suit of shepherd's-plaid, and always with a telescope slung round him. Mr. Dibb, his liver in a worse state than ever with the hot weather, had felt himself compelled to quit the pleasant environs of Clapton, where he ordinarily resided, and had taken a bedroom at Windmill-Hill, Gravesend, whence he came up to his office every morning, having immediately established sworn animosity with every guard and regular passenger on the North-Kent Railway, and having regular hand-to-hand combats with the man who sat opposite to him, as to whether the window should be up or down—combats commencing at Gravesend and finishing at New Cross. Upon Mr. Boppy had come a new phase of existence, he having persuaded Mrs. Boppy, for the first time since their marriage, to go on a visit to some country friends, thus leaving him his own master *pro tem*. And Mr. Boppy availed himself of this opportunity to give a bachelor-party, cards and supper, at which Mr. Pringle was the master of the revels, and they all enjoyed themselves very much, and talked about it afterwards to Mr. Boppy; little thinking of the unrevealed misery that wretched convivialist was enduring on account of his being unable to rid the window-curtains of the smell of tobacco-smoke, by which Mrs. B. would learn of the past symposium, and would "warm" her husband accordingly. Mr. Prescott and Mr. Pringle had been going on much the same as usual; and Mr. Crump never went out of town because his pay was stopped when he was absent from his office, and he never had any friends who wished to see him.

It was a very hot morning, the sun blazed in through

the windows of No. 120, and upon the head of Mr. Pringle, who was copying items of account on to a large ruled sheet of paper.

"Item, every horse for draught or burden—item, each dog, sheep, swine—I'll be blowed if I'll do any more of it," said Mr. Pringle, casting down his pen and rubbing his head. "I must have some soda-water! Prescott, James, was there too much lemon in Quartermaine's punch last night, or was it that the whitebait are growing too large to be wholesome? Something was wrong, I know! Crump, my boy, you're nearest the cellar; just hand me a bottle of the corrective."

Mr. Crump certainly was nearest the cellar, which was in fact the cupboard which should have been his property, but which had been appropriated by Messrs. Pringle and Prescott as a soda-water store.

"That's a good fellow; now you're up, would you mind just handing me a bit of ice out of the basin? Thanks! What a good Crumpy it is! What's the matter, Mr. Dibb?"

"Can't you be silent for an instant, Mr. Pringle? You are perpetually gabbling. Can't you let us have a moment's peace?"

"I can generally," said Mr. Pringle, with an affectation of great frankness; "but, somehow, not this morning. I seem to be inspired by this delicious fluid. I think I shall write a book called Songs of Soda-water, or Lays of the Morning after. That wouldn't be a bad title, would it, Dibb?"

Mr. Dibb took no notice of this beyond glaring at Mr. Boppy, who had laughed; and there was silence for a few minutes, broken by Mr. Prescott, who said, "When do you go on leave, George?"

"In September, sir," replied Pringle. "That's the genial month when the leaves come off."

"Where are you going?"

"That depends upon how much tin I've got. It strikes me, from the present look-out, that the foreign watering-place of Holloway is about as far as I shall be

able to get. There's a tightness in the money-market that's most infernal."

"Why don't you apply to your godfather, old Townshend? He's always treated you with kindness."

"Yes; with un-remitting kindness! wouldn't send me a fiver to save me from gaol. Oh, no! I'll manage somehow. When are you going?"

"Well, I wanted a few days in September myself, if I could get away. I've some shooting offered me at Murray's."

"Murray's? Oh, ah! the parent of that nice little girl! je twig. And the Paterfamilias is a jolly old bird, isn't he, and likes his drink, and has plenty of money? in which case pater-familiarity does not breed contempt."

"They are old friends of my people, you know; and the old gentleman's been very civil to me."

"Ah! and the young lady hasn't been rude, has she?—at least I judged not, from what I saw. She rides deuced well; but what a long time she takes to mount! and when you had swung her to the saddle, I noticed that her reins took an immense deal of arranging!"

"Don't be an idiot, George! you're always fancying things."

"And you're always fancying girls, and my life's passed in keeping you out of scrapes."

"By the way, do you ever see any thing of—"

"Of *the other*? Ah, base deceiver! fickle as the wind, or the what's his name! Yes, I've met poor Kitty once or twice, and, without any nonsense, she looked thoroughly seedy and worn."

"Poor dear Kitty, I'm so sorry! I—"

"Oh, yes, we know all about it; 'he loves and he rides away,' and all the rest of it. But, joking apart, Master Jim, it's a very good thing that business is over. I was really afraid at one time you were going to grief. But—hollo! for me?" These last words thrown off at a tangent to a messenger who entered the room with a letter.

"No, sir; for Mr. Prescott."

"Ah! I don't like letters generally; but that's not a blue one, and looks tolerably healthy. What's it about, James?"

"Read for yourself," and Mr. Prescott tossed the letter over to him.

"Mrs. Schröder—garden fête—Uplands," said Pringle, reading. "Oh, ah! I knew all about that, but I didn't mention it, because I wasn't sure that you'd be asked; and as a certing persing is going, you'd have been as mad as a hatter at losing the chance of meeting her."

"What's Uplands?" asked Prescott.

"Uplands is no end of a jolly place which Schröder has taken for the summer and autumn. He has got some tremendous operation in the mines, or the funds, or some of those things that those City fellows get so brutally rich with; and he must be in town two or three times a week. So instead of going to Switzerland, as he intended, he has rented Uplands, which is about seven miles from town, and might be seventy. Out north way, through Whittington; stunning Italian villa, fitted up no end, with conservatories, and big grounds, and a lake, and all sorts of fun. Belonged to another City buffer, who's over-specified himself and gone to Boulogne. That is a comfort; they do go to smash sometimes; but even then they've generally settled as much as the Chief Commissioner's income on their wives. Schröder heard of this; pounced upon it at once; and this is to be Mrs. Schroder's first garden-party."

"I'm very glad I'm asked, if—"

"Glad you're asked! I should think so; it'll be a first-rate party. There'll be no shy ices or Cape cup; Gunter does the commissariat; the Foreign Office has been instructed to send a lot of eligible Counts; and Edgington will supply the marquee."

"I was going to say, when you were kind enough to interrupt me, that I'm glad I'm asked, if Miss Murray is to be there."

"She'll be there, sir, fast enough; and you shall devote yourself to her, and be the Murray's Guide; and I'll

be your courier, and go before you to see that all is square. I mean to enjoy myself that day, and no mistake."

"This is the place, Jim!" said Mr. Pringle, as on the day of the party they drove in a hansom along a meadow-bordered road some two miles the country side of the little village of Whittington. "That's the house, that white building with the high tower; no end of a smoke-room that tower makes! it's fitted up with lounges and Indian matting; all the windows hook outwards, and there's a view all over every where! What a lot of traps, too!—like the outside of the Star and Garter on a Sunday afternoon. That's the Guards' drag, I suppose; I know there was a lot of them coming down—"

"And there's old Murray's carriage; I'd know that any where," interrupted Prescott.

"Is it? well, then, you'll be all right. Easy, cabby; we don't want to be thrown into the very midst of the aristocracy; we'll get out here, and walk quietly up."

Mr. Pringle had by no means given an exaggerated description of the beauties of Uplands. The house stood on the brow of the hill, under which nestled the little village of Whittington, the only cluster of buildings within a couple of miles' range. All round it lay large meadows, through which flowed, in tiny silver thread, the river Brent; while far away on the horizon lay a thick heavy cloud betokening the position of Babylon the Great. In the house the rooms, though somewhat low, were large and cheerful, and the grounds were laid out in every variety of exquisite taste. There were broad lawns, whereon the croquet-players loved to linger; and noble terraces, where the elderly people sat, sheltered alike from the sun and the wind; and dark winding shady walks, down which, at the close of evening, couples would be seen stealing, and being questioned on their return, would declare that they had been to see the syringa,—a statement which was invariably received with derision, or, as the poet hath it, "Doubts would

be muttered around, and the name he suggested of Walker." And there was a large lake with a real Venetian gondola upon it, very black and gloomy, and thoroughly realising the notion of a "coffin clapt in a canoe," and a large light shallop with an awning, and a couple of outriggers and a water-quintain for those people who preferred athletics to ease, and sunstrokes to comfort.

"This is the right sort of thing, isn't it, my boy?" said Mr. Pringle, as they passed along. "I suppose you could put up with a crib like this, couldn't you? What a lot of people! every body in London here! How do, doctor? Dr. Prater, very good little party; took me behind the scenes at the Opera once, and gave me a certificate when I wanted sick-leave. See that tall man in the fluffy white hat? Mincing-Lane fellow merchant; named Hill; capital fellow, but drops his *h*'s awfully. They call him the *Malade Imaginaire*, because he calls himself 'ill when he isn't. That's his wife in the black dress with white spots on it, like change for a sovereign. Those two tall fellows are in the Second Life-Guards. Look at the nearest one to us, that's Punch Croker; don't he look like an ape? I always long to give him a nut: the other man's Charley Greville, a very good fellow; they tell a capital story about him. His uncle was a tremendous old screw, who left Charley his heir. When the will was read, the first clause contained the expression of a hope that his debts would not be paid. Charley had a copy of this clause sent round to all the creditors, with an indorsement that he, as executor, would religiously fulfil the desire of the deceased. There was a terrible scrimmage about it, and the lawyers are at it now, I believe."

"Isn't this our man—Beresford?"

"Of course it is, and there's Mr. Schröder close by him. We'll go up and make our salaams."

So the young men wound through the crowd, and were very cordially received by Mrs. Schröder, and indeed by Mr. Beresford. For the Commissioner knew his popularity in the Office and was pleased at it, and was always glad to meet decent-looking men belonging

to it in society. "It improved the tone of the confounded place," he used to say. Talking to Mrs. Schröder was Mr. Sergeant Shivers, one of the ornaments of the Old-Bailey bar; a tremendously eloquent man in the florid and ornate style, with a power of cross-examination calculated to turn a witness inside out, and a power of address able to frighten the jury into fits; but who scorned all these advantages, and was never so happy as when talking of and to great people. He was on his favourite topic when Prescott and Pringle arrived.

"Ah, my dear Mrs. Schröder," he was saying, "isn't it sad? The duchess herself sent for me, and said, 'Now, Mr. Sergeant, speak to him yourself. You have experience of life; above all, you have experience of our order. Tell Philip what will be the result of this marriage with Lady Di!' I promised her grace I would; and I did. I spoke not only to Lord Philip, but to Lord Ronald and Lord Alberic, his brothers. But it was no good; the marriage has come off, and now the poor duchess is in despair. Ah! there's Lady Nettleford! I must go and condole with her on the affair;" and the learned sergeant bowed himself off.

"Ah! 'Good-by to the bar and its moaning,' as Kingsley says," remarked Mr. Pringle. "What a dreary bird! Now I see you're fidgetting to be off, Jim; and I know perfectly well why; so we'll go and look after the Murray. What a pity she's not got up in red, like her namesakes! then we could recognise her a mile off."

"There she is!" suddenly exclaimed Mr. Prescott. "There! just crossing the end of the croquet-ground. I'm off, George. I shall find you in plenty of time to go together;" and Mr. Prescott strode away in great haste.

"Very good," said Mr. Pringle; "'and she was left lamenting.' I believe I am in the position of the daughter of the Earl of Ullin; if not, why not? There's no fair young form to hang upon me; man delights me not, nor woman either; so I'll see if there's any moselle-cup handy."

Among those present at the Uplands *fête* were Frank Churchill and Barbara. Alice Schröder had made a great point of their coming; and though at first Barbara refused, yet her husband so strongly seconded the invitation, that she at length gave way and consented. It was a trying time for Barbara: she knew she would there be compelled to meet many of the members of that old set amongst which her youth had been passed, and which she had so sedulously avoided since her marriage, and she was doubtful of her reception by them. Not that that would have distressed Barbara one jot; she would have swept past the great Duchess of Merionethshire herself with uplift eyebrows and extended nostrils; but she knew that Frank was horribly sensitive, and she feared lest any of his sympathies should be jarred. Moreover, she felt certain that Captain Lyster would be at the Uplands; and though since the day of the little outbreak his name had not been mentioned, and all having been made up with a kiss had gone smoothly since, Barbara had an inward dread that the sight of him would arouse Frank's wrath and lead to mischief. However, they came. Barbara was very charmingly dressed; and if her face were a little pale and her expression somewhat anxious, her eye was as bright and her bearing as proud as ever. Alice Schröder received her in the warmest manner, kissed her affectionately, and immediately afterwards without the slightest intention planted a dagger in her breast, by expressing delight at "seeing her among her old friends again." "These old friends"—*i.e.* persons whom she had been in the habit of constantly meeting in society, and who had envied and hated her—were gathered together in numbers at Uplands, and all said civil things to Barbara; indeed, the great Duchess of Merionethshire actually stepped forward a few paces—a condescension which she very rarely granted,—and after welcoming Barbara, begged that Mr. Churchill might be presented to her, "as a gentleman of whom she had heard so much." Barbara rather opened her eyes at this; but after the presentation it was explained by the

duchess saying, "My son-in-law, Lord Hailey, has often expressed his recognition of the services rendered to him by your pen, Mr. Churchill." For Lord Hailey was Foreign Secretary at that time, and certainly gave Churchill plenty of opportunities of defending him. And as they moved away, Barbara heard the duchess say, "What a fine-looking man!" and Mr. Sergeant Shivers, who was thoroughly good-natured, began loudly blowing the trumpet of Frank's abilities. So that Barbara was happier than she had been for some time; and her happiness was certainly not decreased by seeing that the cloud had left Frank's brow, and that he looked in every way his former self.

"Now, Barbara," said Alice Schröder, approaching them, "we are getting up two new croquet sets, and want members for each. You'll play, of course? I recollect how you used to send me spinning at Bissett—oh, by the way, have you heard? poor dear Sir Marmaduke, so ill at Pau, or somewhere—"

"Ill? Sir Marmaduke ill?"

"Yes, poor dear! isn't it sad? And Mr. Churchill will play too; but not on the same side. I can't have you on the same side; you're old married people now; and both such good players too! Let me see; Captain Lyster, will you take Mrs. Churchill on your side?"

Captain Lyster bowed, shook hands, and expressed his delight. Frank Churchill shook hands with Lyster; but as he did so, a flush passed over his face.

"Now, then, that set is full," said Mrs. Schröder; "who is the captain of the other set, playing at the other ground? oh, you, Mr. Pringle! Will you take Mr. Churchill away with you; you only want one, I think?"

"No, madam," said Pringle, with a serio-comic sigh; "I only want one; but I shall want that one all my life. Come along, Mr. Churchill." And he and Frank started off to the lower lawn together.

Barbara had always been very fond of croquet. She played well; relying more upon the effectiveness of her aim than the result of her calculations. She had a per-

fect little foot; and she croqueted her adversaries far away with as much science as malice. She enjoyed the game thoroughly, as, not having played for months, she rejoiced at finding that she retained all her skill; but she could not help perceiving that Captain Lyster was dull and preoccupied, and that he attended so little to the game as to require perpetual reminding when it was his turn to play. Indeed, despite all Barbara's exertions, they might have lost the game—for their opponents were wary and persevering—had it not been for the steady play of their coadjutors, Mr. Prescott and Miss Murray, who evinced a really remarkable talent for keeping close together, and nursing each other through all the difficult hoops. At length they won with flying colours, and were going to begin a new game, when Captain Lyster said, "Mrs. Churchill, I should be so grateful for a few minutes' talk with you on a really important subject. Please, don't play again, but let us stroll." Barbara had all faith in Fred Lyster's truth and honour; she had known him for years, and more than half-suspected the secret of his early attachment to Alice; so that she had no hesitation in saying, "Certainly, Captain Lyster, if you wish it;" then adding with a smile, "You will not miss us much, will you, Mr. Prescott?" she and the Captain strolled away.

Then, as they walked, Fred Lyster talked long and earnestly. He told Barbara that he addressed her as one who, he knew, took the deepest interest in Alice Schröder's welfare; indeed, as one who had been as her sister in times past. He touched lightly on the disparity in age between Alice and her husband, and upon the difference in all their habits, tastes, and opinions; he said that she was thus doubtless driven to her own resources for amusement, and that her utter simplicity and childishness made her the easy prey of designing people. Then, with the utmost delicacy, he went on to point out that for some time Beresford's attentions to Mrs. Schröder had been most marked; that his constant presence at their house, or in attendance on her when she went

out, had attracted attention, and that at length it had become common club-gossip. Only on the previous night he had heard that it had been publicly discussed in the smoke-room of the *Minerva*; that an old gentleman, an old friend of the family, had announced his intention of speaking to Mr. Schröder about it. What was to be done? He (Lyster), deeply pained at it all, had no authority, no influence, no right, to mix himself with the matter. Would not Mrs. Churchill, in pity for her friend, talk seriously with Mrs. Schröder about it? She was all-potential. Mrs. Schröder believed implicitly in her, and would undoubtedly follow her advice. Would not Mrs. Churchill do this, for pity's sake?

Barbara was very much astonished and very much shocked. She had always known Alice to be weak and vain and silly; she knew that her marriage with Mr. Schröder had been one made solely at her father's instigation; but having lived entirely out of the set for the last few months, she had no idea of the intimacy with Mr. Beresford, whose acquaintance she considered was by no means desirable. She was entirely at a loss what to do, being of opinion that her influence over Alice had all died out. However, if Captain Lyster thought otherwise, and if he counselled and urged her taking such a step, she would not refuse; she would take an early opportunity of seeking an interview with Alice, and giving that silly girl—silly, and nothing more, she was certain—a very serious talking to; “and then, Captain Lyster, let us trust that this horrible gossip will be put a stop to.” As Barbara said this, she smiled and put out her hand. Poor Fred bent over it, and when he raised his head to say, “Mrs. Churchill, you will have done an angel's work!” there were tears in his eyes.

Meantime Frank Churchill, with doubt and distrust at his heart, engendered by having to leave Barbara in company with Captain Lyster, went away with Pringle to the lower croquet-ground, where they and others played a succession of games with varying success, in all of which Frank distinguished himself by ferocious swip-

ing, and Mr. Pringle came to grief in an untimely manner. At length, when they were tired, Frank and Pringle walked away together—the former on the look-out for his wife, the latter listening with great deference to such scraps of his companion's conversation as he was treated with; for Mr. Pringle had a great reverence for "people who write books," and, in common with a great many, looked upon the production of a something printable as an occult art. "It always seems such a rum thing to me," said he ingenuously, "how you first think about it, and then how you put it down! You write leaders, Mr. Churchill, eh? Oh yes, we heard of you at our office, the Tin-Tax, you know! That article in the *Statesman* about old Maddox and his K.C.B.'ship, they all declared it was you."

As Churchill only said "Indeed!" in an absent manner, and was still looking about him, Pringle proceeded: "Oh, of course you won't let it out it was your work—we understand that! but it must be jolly to be able to give a fellow one for himself sometimes! a regular bad one, enough to make him drink! I should think that was better fun than novel-writing; though novel-writing must be easier, as you've only got to describe what you see. I think I could do that—this afternoon, for instance, and all the swells and queer people about. The worst of it is, you must touch it up with a bit of love, and I'm not much of a hand at that; but I suppose one could easily see plenty of it to study from. For instance, do you see those two at the end of this walk, under the tree? I suppose that's a spooning match, isn't it? How he is laying down the law! and she gives him her hand, and he bends over it—"

"Damnation!" exclaimed Churchill.

"Hollo!" said Pringle, "what's the matter?"

"Nothing!" said Churchill; "I twisted my foot, that was all!"

Barbara tried several times that evening to meet

Frank; but he avoided her; and it was not until they were in the fly, that she had an opportunity of speaking to him.

"Where on earth have you been, Frank, all day? I hunted and hunted for you, but never succeeded in finding you."

He looked up at her: her eyes were sparkling, her cheek flushed; she was thoroughly happy. The escape from Mesopotamia and its dreariness, the return to scenes similar to those which she had been accustomed to, had worked immediate change. She looked so radiantly beautiful that Frank was half-tempted to spare her; but after a second's pause, he said,

"I walked all over the grounds. I was in the shrubbery close by you when Captain Lyster kissed your hand."

"What!" exclaimed Barbara, with a start. "It is beneath me to repel such a calumny; but to satisfy your absurd doubt, I tell you plainly you were wrong."

"Will you tell me," asked Frank, in a sad voice, "that he did not walk with you and talk with you apart? Can you deny it?"

"No!" returned Barbara. "He did both walk and talk with me; he had something very special to say to me, and he said it."

"And it was—?"

"I cannot tell you; it was told to me in confidence; it concerns the reputation of a third person, and I cannot mention it, even to you."

"Then, by the Lord, I'll have an end to this!" said Frank, in a sudden access of passion. "Listen here, Barbara; I'll have no captains, nor any one else, coming to repose confidences with which I'm not to be made acquainted, in my wife! I'll have no shrubbery-walks and whisperings with you! Such things may be the fashion in the circles in which you have lived; but I don't hold with them!"

He could have bitten his tongue out the next instant, when Barbara said, in an icy voice, "It may be

the fashion in the circles in which *you* have lived to swear at one's wife, and shout at her so that the coachman hears you ; but I don't hold with it, nor, what's more, will I permit it!"

She never spoke again till they reached home, when she stepped leisurely out of the carriage, ignoring Frank's proffered arm, and ~~went~~ silently to bed.

CHAPTER XXVI.

SHOWING WHO WERE "PIGOTT AND WELLS."

MR. SIMNEL, the secretary, sat at his desk, hard at work as usual, but evidently tempering the dulness of the official minutes with some recollections of a lively nature, as now and then he would put down his pen, and smile pleasantly, nursing his knee the while. "Yes," he said softly to himself, "I think I'll do it to-day. I've waited long enough; now I'll put Kitty on to the scent, and stand the racket. *Ruat cælum!* I'll ride quietly up there this afternoon;" and he touched the small hand-bell, with which he summoned his private secretary. In response to this bell,—not the private secretary, who was lunching with a couple of friends and discussing the latest fashionable gossip,—the door was opened by Mr. Pringle, who begged to know his chief's wishes.

"Eh?" said Simnel, raising his head at the strange voice; "oh, Grammont at lunch, I suppose?—how do you do, Mr. Pringle? I want all the letters brought in at once, please; I'm going away early to-day."

"Certainly, sir," said Mr. Pringle, who objected on principle to interviews with great official swells, such interviews being generally connected in his mind with rebukes known as "carpetings." "I'll see about it, sir."

"Thank you, Mr. Pringle. How are all your people? how is Mrs. Schröder? who is your cousin, I think."

"Yes, my cousin. She's all right; but I'm sorry to say my uncle Mr. Townshend is very ill; so ill that he leaves town for the Continent to-night, and is likely to be away some time."

"Dear me! I'm very sorry to hear that."

"Fact, indeed, sir! I was thinking, sir," said Mr. Pringle, who never missed a chance, "that as Mrs. Schröder may perhaps be rather dull to-morrow after her father's gone, I might perhaps have a day's leave of absence to be with her."

"Certainly; by all means, Mr. Pringle! Now send in the letters, please." And Mr. Pringle retired into the next room, where he indulged in the steps of a comic dance popular with burlesque-actors, and known as a "nigger break-down."

"Going out of town, eh? likely to be abroad some time! very unwell!" said Mr. Simnel, nursing his leg; "then I must alter my arrangements. I'll go and see him at once, and bring that matter to a head. I can deal with Kitty afterwards." And when Mr. Simnel had signed all the letters brought in to him, he unlocked his desk and took out a paper which he placed in his pocket-book; then carefully locking every thing after him, he departed.

In the Strand he called a cab, and was driven to Austin Friars, where he dismounted, and walked up the street until he came to a large door, on the posts of which were inscribed the words, "Townshend and Co." There was no Co., there never had been; Mr. Townshend was the entire concern; he was the first of his name who had been known in the place, and no one knew his origin. He first made his mark in the City as a daring money-broker and speculator; two or three lucky hits established his fame, and he then became cautious, wary, well-informed, and almost invariably successful. The name of Townshend was highly thought of on 'Change; its owner had been invited to a seat in the Bank Direction, and had been consulted by more than one Chancellor of the Exchequer; he had been a member of the Gresham Club, there made acquaintances, who introduced him into the True Blue and the No-Surrender, for Mr. Townshend was intensely conservative; and by the time his daughter was fit to head his table (his wife had died years since), he had a set of ancestors on his walls in Harley Street dating

from warriors who fought at Ramillies and Malplaquet, down to the "civil servant of the Company," who shook the pagoda-tree in the East, and from whom, as Mr. Townshend said, his first start in life was derived. It is doubtful—and immaterial—whether Mr. Simnel knew or not of the non-existence of the Co. He asked for Mr. Townshend, whether Mr. Townshend was in; and he put the question to one of four young gentlemen who were writing at a desk, which, if it must be called by its right name, was a counter. After a great deal of fencing with this youth, who was reading out wild commercial documents, such as "Two two four nine, Lammas and Childs on National of Ireland—note for dis.," and who declined to be interrupted until he had completed his task,—Mr. Simnel at length got his name sent in to Mr. Townshend, and was shown into the great man's presence.

Mr. Townshend was seated at a large desk covered with papers, which were arranged in the most precise and orderly fashion. He was dressed with great precision, in a blue body-coat and a buff waistcoat with gilt buttons; his thin hair was brushed up over his temples, and his face was thin and pale. He received his visitor somewhat pompously, and made him a very slight bow. Mr. Simnel returned the salute much in the same fashion, and said, "You will wonder what has brought me to call on you, Mr. Townshend?"

"I—I am not aware what can have procured me the honour of a visit, Mr.—Mr.—" and the old gentleman held up Mr. Simnel's card at arm's-length, and looked at it through his double eye-glass.

"Simnel's my name! I daresay it conveys to you no meaning whatsoever?"

"Oh, I beg your pardon! On the contrary, your name is familiar to me as that of the secretary of the Tin-Tax Office. I am glad to make your acquaintance, sir. I often have communication with official men. What can I do for you?"

"It's in a private capacity that I've come to see you," said Mr. Simnel. "I heard you were going out of

town, and I had something special to talk over with you."

"I must trouble you to be concise and quick," said Mr. Townshend, by no means relishing the easy manner of his visitor. "As you say, I am going out of town,—for the benefit of my health,—and every moment is precious."

"I shall not detain you very long," said Simmel, who had begun to nurse his leg, to Mr. Townshend's intense disgust. "I suppose we're private here? You'll excuse me; but you'll be glad of it before I've done. I may as well be brief in what I have to say; it will save both of us trouble. To begin with: I'm not by origin a London man. I come from Combeardingham; so do you."

Mr. Townshend's cheeks paled a little as he said, "I came from Calcutta, sir."

"Yes; last, I know; but you went to Calcutta, and from Combeardingham."

"I never was in the place in my life."

"Weren't you indeed? then it must have been your twin-brother. I know a curious story about him, which I'll tell you."

"If you are come here to fool away my time, sir!" said Mr. Townshend, rising.

"By no means, my dear sir. You don't know me personally; but I'll pledge my official reputation that the story is worth hearing. I think when I mention the names of Pigott and Wells—"

Down at last—sunk down cowering in his chair, just as at the Schröders' dinner, when he heard those dreadful names.

"Ah, I thought you would remember them. Well, Pigott and Wells were wool-merchants of old standing in Combeardingham. Pigott had long been dead; but Wells carried on the business of the firm under the old name. His solicitors were Messrs. Banner and Blair. One day Mr. Banner came to their articled clerk, and said to him, 'Robert, I have got an awkward business on hand; but you're a sharp fellow and can be trusted

Old Wells is coming here presently *with some one else*. I shall want a signature witnessed; but I'll get Podmore to do that. All you have to do is to keep your eyes against that window,' pointing to a pane hidden behind a curtain; 'and mark all you see, specially faces. It may be a lesson to you on a future occasion.'

"Well, sir?" interrupted Townshend.

"Well, sir, the clerk placed himself as directed, and saw old Mr. Wells and a thick-set, dissipated-looking man shown into the room. Banner told Mr. Wells he was prepared for him, and produced a paper for signature; the signer of which, in consideration of Mr. Wells consenting to forego prosecuting him for the forgery of a bill of 120*l.* attached to the document, promised to leave England and never to return. You're interested now; I thought you would be. Podmore was called in, and witnessed the dissipated young man sign the paper; but he knew nothing of its contents. Then old Wells, raising his shaking forefinger, said, 'For your poor mother's sake, sir; not for yours!' and the dissipated-looking man drew a long breath, as though a great weight were off his mind, and strode out. The artful clerk saw all this, and marked the features of the forger; he did not see him again for many years. He sees him now!"

"What do you mean?"

"Simply, that you were the forger, I the clerk!"

"But that paper—that horrible confession, and the bill, they are destroyed! Wells swore he would destroy them before his death!"

"He intended to do so, but he died suddenly, poor old man; and in going through his desk I found them. I've got them here!"

"And what use are they to you? What harm are they to me? I shall swear—"

"Stop a minute! Podmore is alive; he's got Banner and Blair's business in Combeardingham now; he would verify his signature any day, and yours too. No; I fairly tell you I've thought of it all for several years,

and I don't see your loophole. I think I've got you tight!" And Mr. Simmel smiled pleasantly as he squeezed his thumb and forefinger together, as though he were choking a rabbit.

Mr. Townshend was cowering in his chair, and had covered his face with his hands. When he raised it, he was livid. "What do you want?—money?"

"No," said Simmel, "not exactly. Oddly enough, I want nothing at present! I merely wanted, as you were going out of town, to set matters straight, and let us understand each other before you left. I'll let you know when I really require you to do something for me, and you'll not fail, eh?" These last words rather sharply.

"In all human—I mean—in a—" and the old man stammered, broke down, and threw himself back in his chair, sobbing violently.

"Come, come!" said Simmel; "don't take on so! You'll not find me hard; but you know in these days one must utilise one's opportunities. There, good-by! you won't forget my name; and I'll write here when I want you,"

And he touched, not unkindly, the shrinking old man's shoulder, and went out.

CHAPTER XXVII.

WEAVING THE WEB.

IN his well-deserved character of prudent campaigner, Mr. Simnel took no immediate steps to avail himself of the signal advantage which he had gained in his interview with Mr. Townshend. That eminent British merchant went abroad, and his name was recorded among a choice sprinkling of fashionables as honouring the steamship *Baron Osy*, bound for Antwerp, with their presence, and, on the "better-day-better-deed" principle, selecting the Sunday as the day of their departure. Mr. Simnel read the paragraph with a placid smile; he had seen sufficient of Mr. Townshend in that interview to guess that his illness was merely the result of care and worry, and that there was no reason to apprehend his proximate death. Antwerp—doubtless thence Brussels, the Rhine, and perhaps Switzerland—would make a pleasant tour; and as for any idea of escape, he knew well enough that that thought had never crossed Mr. Townshend's mind. The old gentleman knew he would have to pay the possessor of his secret heavily in one way or another, but in what he was as yet totally ignorant; besides, his business engagements in London utterly prevented all chance of his retiring in any sudden manner. And so Mr. Simnel remained quietly at his post at the Tin-Tax Office, apparently not taking any notice of any thing save the regular business routine, but in reality intent on his earnest cat-like watching of all around him, and always ready to pull any string at what he considered the proper opportunity.

He kept his eyes on Mr. Beresford, and knit his eyebrows very much as he contemplated that gentleman's

proceedings. Whether prompted by anxiety for the fate of his eight-hundred pounds loan or by some other occult reason, Mr. Simnel had been specially watchful over the Commissioner, and urged upon him to bring the speculation in which he had embarked to a prosperous close. With this view he had dissuaded Beresford from going to Scotland, whither, as usual, he was bound on his autumnal excursion; representing to him that he had of late been very lax in his attendance; that he had had much more leave of absence than any of his brother commissioners; that Sir Hickory Maddox had once or twice referred to the subject in any thing but a complimentary manner; and that the best thing he could do to stave off an impending row would be to volunteer to stop in town, and let the other members of the board have a chance of running away in the fine weather. At this suggestion Mr. Beresford looked very black and waxed very wroth, and couldn't see why the deuce, and on his oath couldn't tell the necessity, &c.; but relented somewhat when his friend pointed out to him that there was no necessity for his attending more than twice a week at the office, just to sign such papers as were pressing; and that instead of remaining in his South-Audley-Street lodgings, he could go out and take rooms at a beautiful little inn in the village of Whittington, where there was a glorious cook, a capital cellar, beautiful air, splendid prospect, and above all, which was twenty minutes' canter from the Uplands, Schröder's summer place. To this plan Mr. Beresford consented; and after asking for a further loan of fifty, and getting five-and-twenty, from Simnel, Beresford and his mare Gulnare were domesticated at the Holly Bush, and he prepared to make play.

But somehow the state of affairs did not please Mr. Simnel. One day, when he and Mr. and Mrs. Schröder were Beresford's guests, he seemed specially annoyed; and on the next occasion of his friend's visiting the office, he took the opportunity of speaking to him.

"I want to say a word to you, Master Charles," said

he, entering the board-room and addressing Beresford, who was stretched on the sofa reading the *Post*, and envying the sportsmen whose bags were recorded therein. "I want to know how you're getting on."

"Getting on! in what way?" asked Beresford, putting down the paper and lazily looking round; "as regards money, do you mean? because, if so, I could take that other five-and-twenty from you with a great amount of satisfaction."

"You're very good," said Simmel, with a sardonic grin; "but I'd rather not. I'm afraid you've been trying some of Dr. Franklin's experiments with kites again recently; at all events, I've seen several letters addressed to you in Parkinson's—of Thavies Inn, I mean—hand-writing; which looks any thing but healthy. However, I didn't mean that; I meant in the other business—the great venture."

"Oh," said Beresford, "that's all right."

"I'm glad to hear it. Satisfactory, and all that sort of thing, eh?"

"Perfectly. Why do you ask?"

"Well, to tell you the truth," said Simmel, with that kind of honest bluntness, that inexpressible frankness, generally assumed by a man who is going to say something disagreeable, "I had an idea that it was quite the opposite. When we dined with you the other day,—deuced good dinner it was too; I was right to recommend you there, wasn't I? I haven't tasted such spitchcocked eels for years; and that man's moselle has a finer faint flavour of the muscat than any I know in England,—when we dined with you, as I say, I fancied things were all wrong with the lady. I talked to the old boy, as in duty bound, and listened to all his platitudes about the influence of money—as though I didn't know about that, good lord! But the whole time I was listening, and chiming in here and there with such interjections as I thought appropriate, I kept my eye on you and madam; and from what I saw, I judged it wasn't all plain-sailing. I was right; wasn't I?"

"Well," said Mr. Beresford, between his teeth, "you were, and that's the truth. We've come to grief somehow; but how, I can hardly tell. It was going on splendidly; I had followed all your instructions to the letter, and, in fact, I was thoroughly accepted as her brother, when she suddenly veered round; and though I can't say she's been unkind, yet she has lost all that warmth that so pleasantly characterised her regard; and now, I think, rather avoids me than otherwise."

"You've not overdone it, have you? Not been lapsing into your old style of flirtation, and—"

"No; on my honour, no. I rather think some of her friends have been putting the moral screw on. You recollect a Miss Lexden—Mrs. Churchill that is now?"

"Perfectly! But *she* would not be likely to object to a flirtation."

"Not as mademoiselle, but as madame she has rangéed herself, and I believe her husband is a straight-laced party. She was up at Uplands for a couple of days, and rather snubbed me when I presented myself there in my fraternal character. I've been putting things together in my mind, and I begin to think that Mrs. Schröder's coldness dated from Mrs. Churchill's visit."

"Likely enough. I daresay Mrs. Churchill goes in tremendously now for all the domestic virtues. If a reformed rake makes the best husband, a penitent flirt ought to make the best wife; and, by all accounts, Miss Barbara Lexden was a queen of the art. I hear that she and her husband lead a perpetually billing-and-cooing existence, like a pair of genteelly-poor turtles, in some dovecot near Gray's Inn."

"That man Lyster's been a good deal to the house lately, too. I always hated that fellow, and I know he hates me; he looks at me sometimes as though he could eat me. Schröder seems to have taken a fancy to him; and I sometimes half fancy that he has a kind of spoony attachment to Mrs. Schröder—if you recollect, I told you I thought he was after her when we were all down at Bissett—though I don't think very much of that. I'll

tell you what it is, Simnel," continued Mr. Beresford, in a burst of confidence, struggling up into a sitting position on the sofa, and beating his legs with the folded newspaper as he spoke, "I'm getting devilish sick of all this dodging and duffing, and I've been thinking seriously of calling my creditors together, getting them to take so much a-year, and then going in quietly and marrying Kate Mellon after all."

Mr. Simnel's face flushed but for an instant; it was its normal colour when he said,

"You're mad! You, with the ball at your foot, to think of such a course! So much a-year, indeed! Butchers and bakers do that sort of thing, I believe, when they've been let in; but not forty-per-cent men; not money-lending insurance-offices. Breathe a hint of your state, and they'd be down upon you at once, and sell you up like old sticks. Besides, you couldn't come to any arrangement with your creditors without its leaking out somehow. It would get into those infernal trade-circulars, or protection-gazettes, or whatever they're called; and if the Bishop or Lady Lowndes heard of it, all your chances of inheriting in either of those quarters would be blown to the winds. As to—to Kate Mellon, you may judge how your alliance with her would please either of the august persons I have named."

"Jove! you're right," said Beresford, biting his nails.

"Right, of course I am; and here you've only to wait, and an heiress—a delightful little creature to boot—is absolutely thrown into your arms. You're a child, Charley, in some things,—you clever men always have a slate off somewhere, you know,—and in business you're a positive child. Can't you see that yours must be a waiting race?—that you mustn't mind being hustled, and bothered, and cramped, at the beginning, but must always keep your eyes open for your chance, and then make the running? The least impetuosity, such as you hint at, would throw away every hope, and destroy a very excellently planned scheme. Oh, you needn't wince

at the word; we are all schemers in love, as well as in every thing else, if we only acknowledged it."

"Then you counsel my keeping on still, and endeavouring to regain my influence?"

"Certainly; by all means. It will come back, never fear. And look here, Charley; don't fall into that horribly common and vulgar error of abusing the people who are supposed to be thwarting your plans. Be specially kind, on the contrary, in all you say of them. This Captain Lyster, for instance, I should proclaim, if I were you, a thorough gentleman—a *preux chevalier* of a type now seldom seen—a man evidently smothering an unhappy passion for—for—any body but Mrs. Schröder. Wouldn't the other one do? Mrs. Churchill, I mean."

"Do! What do you mean? There used certainly to be a flirtation between them at one time, and—"

"Quite enough. Only keep Mrs. Schröder from the notion that Lyster is spooning her; for that's enough at once to turn her silly little thoughts to him. Speak kindly of every one; and don't show the smallest signs of weariness, depression, or discouragement."

When Mr. Simnel returned to his own room, he settled himself down into his chair, and fell to nursing his leg and thinking, with the old sinister smile on his face.

"He's not the easiest fellow in the world to deal with—Beresford! At least, he'd be difficult to some; but I think I've got him in hand. Wants every thing to run slick off the reel at once, the idiot! As though any great coup had ever been pulled off, save by waiting, and watching, and patience. Marry Kate Mellon, indeed!" and here Mr. Simnel's fingers, intertwined across his knee, cracked as he pulled at them—"marry Kate Mellon, and with such a damned air of patronage too! No, my young friend, never! You held a trump-card there, and you neglected to play it; and in my game there's no revoking. I must see Kitty, and look how the land lies. I think I've stalled Master Charley off for some little time; and it's no use bringing about an *éclaircissement*

of the Schröder business; which Kitty would be safe to do as soon as she had any tangible proofs. Then I should lose my eight hundred pounds in Charley Beresford's general and helpless smash. But I'd sooner drop them than miss my chance of Kitty. Slippery, though—slippery as the deuce!" and Mr. Simmel put his elbow on his knee, and his face into his hand, and sat plucking at his chin: "hankers after Beresford, no doubt,—I think has a liking for that young Prescott; but that I'll put a stop to to-day,—and I suppose only thanks me for my kindness. And yet I can put the finishing stroke to the whole thing in one moment; only want the one connecting-link and the story's complete; and then I'll take my oath she'll have me. I'll ride up there this afternoon, and just see how the land lies."

In accordance with this determination, Mr. Simmel that afternoon mounted his thoroughbred and cantered off to The Den. He found the mistress of the house at home, seated on a rustic seat, in a little grass-plot in front of the drawing-room window, with a carriage-whip in her hand, with which she was flicking the heads off such flowers as were within reach. She had evidently just come in from a drive, for she still wore her bonnet and black-lace shawl, though the former was perched on the top of her head, to keep off the sun, while the latter hung trailing down her back. She had altered in appearance, and not for the better: her eyes were unnaturally bright; her cheeks sunken, and marked here and there with hectic patches. Simmel gave his horse to a groom, and walked up the garden-path. Kate Mellon looked up at the sound of his advancing footsteps; at first vacantly enough, but when she recognised him, she roused herself, and got up to meet him.

"How are you, Simmel?" she said, with outstretched hand. "I was thinking of you only to-day, and wondering what had become of you. It's ages since you've been up here."

"I've been very busy, Kate, and been unable to come. You know my wish is to come as frequently as possible;

oh, you needn't shake your head, because you are quite certain of it; but that's neither here nor there. I keep to my portion of the contract, and sha'll not bore you about myself until I've shown you I've a right to ask you to listen to me. And now, how are you, and what are you doing? To tell truth, I don't think you look very bonny, young woman: a little dragged, eh? End of the season, perhaps?"

"Oh, I'm all right!" said Kate, hurriedly; "never better in health, and jolly; that's the great point, isn't it, Simnel, eh? I'm learning to look after number one, you know; and when you can do that, you're all right, ain't you? Have some lunch? No? then look here; I've got something you must taste,—some wonderful Madeira. Oh, all right; I know it'll put some colour into your cheeks, and do you good."

She called to a passing servant, and the wine was brought,—rare old tawny, full-bodied, mellow Madeira,—such wine as is now to be met in about a dozen houses in the land, and utterly different from the mixture of mahogany-shavings and brandy which is sold under its name. Simnel poured out two half-glasses; but Kate took the decanter from him, filled her glass to the brim, and nodding to him, drank off half its contents.

"Ah!" said she, with a long-drawn inspiration; "that's the stuff! No nonsense in that, you know; doesn't pretend to be what it isn't, and can't deceive you. Tom Gillespie sent me a lot of that: found no end of it in the cellars of his old uncle, the East-India Director, whose tin he came in for. I find it does me good, steadies my nerve, and gives me fresh life. What are you shaking your head at?"

"It's dangerous tippie, Kate. I don't like to hear you talk like that. Your nerves used to be as strong as steel, without any steadying. I say, Kitty," said Mr. Simnel with a grave face; "you're not giving way to this sort of thing for—"

"For what?" interrupted Kate, with a discordant laugh; "for comfort? Oh, no, thank you; I don't want

that yet: I don't want to drown my sorrows in the bowl. I haven't got any sorrows, and I shouldn't do that with them if I had. By the way, Simnel, how is that affair going on,—you know what I mean? You promised to let me know."

"I believe it stands very much the same as it did," said he.

"Then it hasn't worn out yet? he isn't tired of it, is he?" she asked eagerly.

"No; it still goes on."

"You promised to tell me the woman's name, Simnel; why haven't you done so? You pretend friendship for me, and then you keep things from me that I ought to know; and you don't come and see me, and,—There, I don't believe in you a bit!"

"I keep things from you until the proper time for you to know them. I don't come and see you, because all the leisure time I have had has been devoted to your interests; and, by the way, Kate, that brings me to the occasion of my present visit. I suppose you give me credit for sincerity—"

"Oh, ah; well, what then?"

"I mean that you believe in me sufficiently to think that any step I should take, any question I should ask, would not be out of mere idle curiosity; but because I thought they would be beneficial to you?"

She nodded her head, and stretched her hand towards the decanter; but seeing Simnel frown, she stopped short, took up the whip which lay close by, and commenced flicking the flowers again.

"I want to ask you about your people,"—the girl started;—"who they are; where you came from; what you know of them."

"You know all that fast enough,—from Yorkshire,—you've heard me say before. What more's wanted to be known? I pay my way, don't I, and who does more? I'm not required to show my christening certificate to every one that wants a horse broke, I suppose?"

"What a fiery child it is!" said Simnel. "No one

has a right to ask any thing at all about it,—I least of all; but I think,—and I am not sanguine, you know,—that I shall be able, if you will confide in me, to help you very greatly in the most earnest wish of your life.”

“Stop!” exclaimed Kate; “do you know what that is?”

“I think I do,” said Simnel, looking at her kindling eyes, quivering nostril, and twitching lips.

“If not, I’ll tell you; I don’t mind telling you: revenge on Charles Beresford! revenge! revenge!” and at each repetition of the word she slashed savagely at the tall flowers near her.

“Well, I think I might say I could help you in that,” said Simnel quietly; “but you must be frank. You know I’m a man of the world; and I’ve made it my business to go a little into this question. So now tell me your life, from the first that you can remember of it.”

“You’re a cool hand, Simnel; but I know you mean running straight, so I don’t mind. First thing of all I can recollect is being held out at arm’s length by Phil Fox, as the child in his great trick-act of Rolla, or the something of Peru. The circus belonged to old Fox, Phil’s father; and I used to live with the Foxes,—the old man and woman and Bella Fox, and Phil and his wife. Bad lot she was: had been a splendid rider, but fell and broke her leg; and was always vicious and snappish, and that irritating, I wonder Phil could put up with her. They were very kind to me, the Foxes, and I was quite like their own child; and I played fairies, and flower-girls, and columbines, and such like, all on horseback, in all the towns we went circuit. I used to ask the old man sometimes about myself; but he never would say more than that I was his little apprentice, and I should find it all right some day. And so I went on with them till I grew quite a big girl, and used to do the barebacked-steed business, and what I liked better, the riding-habit and the highly-trained charger dodge, until old Fox declared there was no better

rider in England than me. I was just nineteen, when he sent for me one night,—it was at Warwick, I recollect, and we'd had a stunning house,—and I found him with two gentlemen standing with him. He pointed to one of them, and he said to me: 'Express'—that's the name he used to call me,—'Express, this is the gentleman that bound you 'prentice to me ever so many years ago. He's come to take you away now, and make your fortune.' I cried, and said I didn't want my fortune made, and that I wouldn't go; but after a long talk full of business, I saw it would be for my good, and I agreed. So this place was bought for me in my name, and here I've been ever since."

"And who were those gentlemen?"

"That's exactly what I can't tell you."

"Can't tell?"

"Won't, if you like it better. There, don't look vexed. I'll tell you this much, one of them was my uncle,—my real uncle, I firmly believe,—though on which side you must find out."

"And the other?"

"The other I love dearer than any one on earth."

"Dearer than you loved—"

"I know who you're going to say; infinitely dearer! but in—there; there's enough of that. One thing more I'll tell you: up to this hour I've never been told my father's name or rank in life."

"And this benevolent uncle did it all? Quite like a play, by Jove! Well, I've not learned much; but I may be able to make something of it—something that will be good for us both."

"That's all right! and now your business is finished?"

"Yes, entirely—no, not quite, by the way; I wanted to say one word to you on another subject. You know I'm not likely to be jealous, Kitty—"

"So far as I'm concerned, you've no right to be."

"I know, of course; but still one doesn't like these things. There's a young man named Prescott, who is in my office. I notice that he's constantly in your com-

pany; I've met you with him half-a-dozen times, and I hear frequently from others of his being with you."

"What of that?" she asked, with flushing cheek; "are you to settle my company for me?"

"Not at all—not at all; but I'm speaking both for your good and his. He's a young fellow of good abilities; but he's thoughtless and foolish, and, what's worse than all, he's poor. Now this riding about, horse-hiring and that sort of thing, necessarily leads him into expense; and from what I hear, he's going a great deal too fast. I hear all sorts of things about the young fellows who are under me, and I'm told that your friend Mr. Prescott is getting involved in money-matters; in fact, that he's mixed up in bill-transactions to an amount which, for him, is heavy, with a blood-sucking rascal named Scadgers, who is one of the pests of society in general, and government offices in particular."

"Scadgers!" replied Kate; "what a funny name! Scadgers, eh?"

"A good many people have found it any thing but a funny name, Kitty. Now, though I don't suppose there's any thing between you and Mr. Prescott—"

"Don't you trouble any more about that; perhaps you've never noticed that Mr. Prescott never is with me except when one of my pupils is there too: now do you understand?"

"There was no pupil nor any one else with you when I saw him talking to you in the Row some twelve months since; and he scuttled off as I rode up: however, I thought I'd warn you about him. He's on the downward road, and unless he pulls up, he'll come to grief; and it wouldn't do for you to be mixed up in any thing of that sort."

He sat some time longer talking of ordinary matters, and rattling on in his best style. In every thing he said there was a tinge of attention almost bordering on respect to his companion, which she did not fail to notice, and which decidedly impressed her in his favour. In-

deed, Kate Mellon never had imagined that Mr. Simmel could have made such progress in her good graces as he did this day. They never recurred to any serious topic until his horse was brought, when just as he was mounting she touched him on the shoulder, and said, "You'll not forget to keep me up to the mark about that business?" then, with a half-shuddering laugh, "I'm still interested, you know, in that young man's progress." Simmel wheeled round and looked at her steadily under his bent eyebrows. "You shall be made acquainted with any thing that happens, depend upon it. Adieu!" and he sprang to the saddle, raised his hat, and rode slowly off.

"Not half cured yet," said he to himself, "not half; and yet so savage at his slight, that she'd do him any bad turn on the spur of the moment, and repent of it instantly. She was telling truth about Prescott, I know; but it was best to break up that instantly. How lovely she looked! a little flushed, a little excited; but that only added to her charm. I didn't like that Madeira being so handy, by the way; I must look after that. By Jove, what a fairy it is! where's there one to compare to her? so round and plump and well put together! And if I can only square this family history—uncle, eh? who the deuce can that have been? That's an important link in the chain. And somebody she loves, too; what the deuce does that mean? Ah, well, it's coming to a head now: another month ought to enable me to pull up the curtain on the last act of the drama."

And Kate returned to her garden-chair as the sound of the horse's hoofs died away in the distance; and throwing herself back, and drumming with her fingers upon the little table, went off into a reverie. She thought of her devotion to Beresford; how the passion had first grown when he first knew her; how she had given way to it; and how the nourishment of it was one of the brightest phases in her strange odd life. She remembered the first time she saw him, the first compliment

he paid her; the way in which his easy jolly behaviour struck her as compared with the dreary vapidity, or, what was worse, the slangy fastness of the other men of her acquaintance. And then she thought of that eventful evening when she had knelt at his feet and—she dashed her clenched fist upon the table as she remembered that, and shuddered and bit her lips when she thought that a description of that scene had been given amid ribald shouts. Mr. Simmel had not so much share of her thoughts as probably he would have wished; but she pondered for a few moments on his eagerness to obtain particulars of her early life, and wondered what scheme he had in hand. She had a very high opinion of his intellect, and felt sure he was using it just then in her service; but she could not conceive to what end his labours were tending. And then she remembered what he had said about Mr. Prescott; and her face grew a little sad.

“Poor Jim!” she said to herself; “poor fellow! going to grief, is he? in debt and dropping his money, like a young fool as he is. And that nice girl, too, so fresh and jolly and countrified and innocent! Lord help us! What are you at, Kitty, you idiot! why should those things give you a twinge? Steady, now; it’s not often your heart buck-jumps like that. They’ll go all right, those though, if Jim can only be put square. And that he shall be! What’s the use of my hoarding in my old stocking; it’ll never be any good to me; and so I may as well have the pleasure of helping somebody else. Scadgers, that was the name; I’ll get that put right at once. Scadgers! I wonder where he lives. However, that’ll be easily found out. Poor Jim! what a good husband he’ll make that rosy-faced girl!”

What was it that made Kate Mellon’s head drop on her hands, and the tears ooze through the fingers covering her eyes? Not the thought of Mr. Prescott’s marrying some one else surely, for had she not resolutely snubbed his proposals? Certain it is that she remained with her head bowed for full ten minutes, and that when she looked up, her face was tear-dabbled and her eyes red

and swollen. She took no heed of her appearance, however, but walked into the house, and pulling out her gaudy blotting-book, she scrawled a long letter, which, when finished, she addressed to "F. Churchill, Esq., *Statesman Office, E.C.*"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

TIGHTENING THE CURB.

THE garden-party at Uplands had a serious effect on the household in Great Adullam Street. Of course the actual disturbance, the state of warfare engendered by what Frank Churchill imagined he had seen take place between his wife and Captain Lyster in the shrubbery, did not last long. When Barbara swept up to her bedroom from the hired brougham, Frank retreated into his little snugger and lit his old meerschaum-pipe, and sat gazing vacantly through the smoke-wreaths, and pondering on the occurrences of the day. He could scarcely realise to himself what had passed; he could scarcely imagine that the woman to whom, twelve months since, he had sworn fealty, whose lightest whisper caused his pulse to throb, and who, on her part, had changed the whole style and current of her life for the sake of fulfilling her determination to be his and his alone, could have so far repented of that great crisis in her career as to listen to the compliments of another man, to receive, with evident satisfaction, his unqualified admiration, and to fly off in a rage, with fire in her eyes and bitter words on her lips, when her husband remonstrated with her on her conduct. Here were they, that "twain one flesh," that mysterious two-in-one, sitting under the same roof indeed, but in separate rooms; each thinking hard thoughts of the other, each with anger rife against the other, and with harsh words applied to each other yet ringing in their ears. Great Heavens! thought Frank, was this what he had fondly pictured to himself? Was this the quiet haven of repose, the lodge in the vast wilderness of Mesopo-

tamia, with one fair spirit for his minister, on which he had so rashly reckoned? Was the lodge to be a divided territory? and was the fair spirit to be equally fair to some other man, and to be a minister of the blatant, reviling, Boanerges class? Instead of the quiet and rest on which he had calculated, and which were so necessary to him after his exciting hard work, was his mind to be racked by petty jealousies, his peace invaded by wretched squabbles, the sunshine of his existence overclouded with gloom and doubt? Was his wife to be an adversary instead of a helpmate? were her— And then abruptly he stopped in his self-torturing, as he thought of her,—how friendless and unprotected she was, how he alone was her prop and stay in the world; and then he turned the whole matter in his mind, and it occurred to him that that horribly irritable temper of his might have led him again into mischief, causing him to see things that really might not have happened, and to use language far stronger than there was any necessity for, and to render him violent and undignified and absurd, and so completely to do away with the force accruing from his right position. For undoubtedly he was in the right position; for had he not seen with his own eyes—what? They were walking together, certainly; but there was no reason why that should not be: fifty other couples were promenading the same grounds at the same time, and—no! on reflection, he did not see Lyster kiss her hand; it was that young idiot who was gabbling to him the whole time, and who said something about it. Perhaps nothing of the kind had occurred. Barbara had denied it instantly; and when had she ever breathed a falsehood to him? She was not the style of woman to equivocate; her pride would save her from that; and—it must have been all fancy! some horrible mistake, out of which had arisen this wretched scene and his worse than wretched rage. And now there was something between them, some horrible misunderstanding which must be at once set right. If—if any thing were to happen to either of them, and one were to die while there was enmity, or something like it, exist-

ing between them! and this thought caused the meerschäum to be laid aside unfinished, and sent Frank striding up, four stairs at a time, to his bedroom.

He found Barbara sitting in her white dressing-gown, arranging her hair before the looking-glass. Her face was very white, her eyelids a little red and puffed, and her lips were tightly pressed together. She took no notice of the opening of the door, but went calmly on with her toilet. Frank was a little disconcerted by this; he had calculated on a tender look of recognition, a few smothered words of explanation, and a final tableau in each other's arms. But as Barbara, with the greatest serenity, still appeared completely immersed in the intricate plaiting evolutions she was performing with a piece of her hair and a stalwart hair-pin, Frank advanced gently, and standing behind her chair, touched her shoulder, and said softly, "Darling!"

There was no reply; but the hands occupied in the plaiting manoeuvre perhaps shook a little.

"My darling," repeated Frank, "won't you notice me?"

"Were you speaking to me?" asked Barbara in an icy voice, and looking up at him with a calm rigid blank face.

"To whom else should I be speaking? to whom else should I apply that term?"

"Really I can't say. The last time you spoke to me, you were good enough to swear; and as I know you pride yourself on your consistency, I could not imagine you could so soon alter your tone."

"No; but, Barbara dearest, you should not throw that in my teeth; you know that I was vexed; that I—"

"Vexed, Frank! Vexed! I wonder at you! You accuse me of something utterly untrue, in language such as I have never listened to before; and then, as an excuse, you plead that you were vexed!"

"I was foolish, Barbara, headstrong and horrible, and let my confounded temper get the mastery over me; but then, child, you ought to forgive me; for all I did was

from excess of love for you. If I did not hang upon every word, every action, of yours, I should be far less exacting in my affection. You should think of that, Barbara."

His voice was broken as he spoke, and she noticed that the hand which was upon her chair-back shook palpably.

"You *could* not have meant what you said in the brougham, Frank," said she in a softened tone. "You could not have imagined that I should have permitted—there, I cannot speak of it!" she exclaimed abruptly, placing her handkerchief to her swimming eyes.

"No, my darling, I will not. I could not—I never—of course—fool that I am!" and then incoherently, but satisfactorily, the question was dismissed.

Dismissed temporarily, but by no means forgotten, by no means laid aside by either of them. Captain Lyster called the next day while Frank was at the office, eager to see whether Mrs. Churchill had repented of the task she had undertaken in counselling and warning Alice Schröder; and Barbara told her husband on his return of the visit she had had, and mentioned it with eyes which a desire not to look conscious rendered somewhat defiant, and with cheeks which flushed simply because it was the last thing they ought to have done. Heaven knows Barbara Churchill had nothing to be ashamed of in being visited by Captain Lyster. She never had the smallest sign of a feeling stronger than friendship for him, and yet she felt somewhat guilty, as she acknowledged to herself that his visit had given her very great pleasure. The truth was that the garden-party at Uplands had completely upset the current of Barbara's life. When, in the first wild passion of her love for him who became her husband, she had willingly forfeited all that had hitherto been the pleasure of her life,—the luxury and admiration in which she had been reared, the pleasant surroundings which had been hers since her cradle,—she had found something in exchange. She had given up half-a-hundred friendships, which she knew to be hollow and empty; but she had consoled herself with

one vast love, which she believed to be lasting and true, and which, after all, was a novelty.

As has been said, Barbara had had her flirtations innumerable, but she had never known before what love was; and having a very sensitive organisation, and going in heart and soul for the new passion, she had not in any great degree, at all events, felt the alteration in her position. Although every thing was different and inferior, every thing was in some degree connected with him, who was paramount in her idea to any thing she had ever known. She might feel the dulness of the neighbourhood, the smallness of the house, the difference in the society and in her own occupations and amusements; but all these were part and parcel of that sun of her existence—her husband; that great luminary, in whose brilliant rays all little gloom-spots were swallowed up and merged. Even when the glamour died away, and the blacknesses stood out in bold relief, she had been so dazed by the brightness, and, owing to the thorough change, the events of her past life seemed so far away, as to awaken but very little remorse or regret. She was beginning to bear with something like patience the prosiness of her mother-in-law, the spiteful criticisms of Mrs. Harding, the hideous vulgarity of some of her other neighbours. But the visit to Uplands came upon her as a terrific shock. Once more mixing in her old society, hearing the fashionable jargon to which she had been accustomed from her youth up; meeting those who had always looked up to her as their superior in beauty, and consequently in marketable value; listening to soft compliments; seeing her wishes, ever so slightly hinted, obeyed with alacrity; breathing once more that atmosphere in which she was reared, but from which she seemed to have been long estranged,—Barbara felt more and more like Barbara Lexden, while Barbara Churchill faded hazily away. The dull, dull street,—the dead, dead life,—the poverty which prescribed constant care in the household management,—the dowdy dresses and second-hand manners of the inhabitants of the quarter,—

the daily vexations and cares and wrong-way rubbings,—seemed all to belong to some hideous dream, while the real existence passed into the former life with a pleasant addition in the person of Frank. The pleasure was brief enough, and she woke to all the horrors rendered doubly bitter by the short renewal of bygone joys. The clock had struck twelve, the ballroom had vanished, and she was again Cinderella with haunting memory for her glass-slipper. The prince remained, certainly; but he was no longer a prince; he had bad tempers, and was peevish and jealous, and thoroughly mortal. She had returned to the dust and dreariness of Great Adullam Street, and the rattling cabs, and Mrs. Churchill in her old black-silk dress, and the Hebrews opposite smoking their cigars at the open windows in the hot summer evenings. She could scarcely fancy that there was a world where people dressed in full muslin, and pink-crape bonnets, or bewitching hats; where business was unknown, and work never heard of; where there were perpetual croquet-parties and picnics and horticultural fêtes; where there were night-drives homeward in open carriages after Richmond dinners; and where the men talked of something else than when Brown was going to bring out his poems, or what a slating Smith's novel had had in the *Scourge*. In that brief respite from her weary life, she had heard those around her talking of their plans to be carried out on the then occurring break-up of the season; she had heard girls talk with rapture of their approaching visits to German Spas and Italian lakes; she had heard arrangements made for meeting in English country-houses, where she had formerly been an eagerly sought-for guest; or at fashionable seabords, where she had been the reigning belle. And she came back with the full knowledge that a fortnight's run to some cockney watering-place, handy of access to London, where she could live in cheap lodgings and play a very undistinguished part, would be all the relaxation she could possibly hope for. And all this sunk into her soul, and made her wretched and discontented, and formed the

wandering isles of night which dashed the very source and fount of her day.

It was wrong, undoubtedly. She had chosen her course, and must run it; as the Mesopotamians would have expressed themselves, she had made her bed, and must lie upon it. She had her husband to think of, and should have struggled womanfully to bear up against all these small crosses and disquietudes for his sake; she should have met her fate with a brave heart, and striven to prevent his having any suspicion of the longings and disappointments by which she was racked. Barbara should have done all this, as we in our different way should have done so much, which we have resolutely omitted,—paid that bill, for instance; avoided that woman; not bought that horse; helped that old friend; denied ourselves that fling in print at Jones. She should have done; but, like us, she didn't. Her character was any thing but perfect; and the very pride on which she so much prided herself, and which should have left her straight, now turned against herself, and, "like a hedgehog rolled the wrong way," pricked her mercilessly. She did indeed struggle to contend with the feelings which were conquering her, and which were the "little low" sensations renewed with tenfold force; but without success. A dead dull despair, a loathing and detestation of all the circumstances of her life, a horror of the people round her, and a wild regret for what had gone before never to return,—these were the demons which beset Barbara's daily path. And with them at one time came the first threatenings of another feeling which would have been more destructive to all chance of present or future happiness than any other, had not Providence in its mercy counteracted its effect by a passion, bad indeed, torturing, and hurtful, but nothing like so deadly as the other. Weighed down by her real or fancied misery, constantly repining in secret, and comparing her present with her past life, Barbara might have been tempted to think of Frank as the agent of her wretchedness, as the primary mover in the chain of events which had made

her exchange Tyburnia for Great Adullam Street, luxury for comparative poverty, and happiness for despair; she might have done this, but she became jealous. She noticed that lately Frank's manner had been strange and preoccupied; that he was away from home very much more frequently than when they were first married; that from what she gathered when she heard him talking with his friends, he evidently sought work which took him out, and on two or three occasions had gone on country trips in the interest of the journal—duty which did not fall to his lot, and which he had never undertaken before. His manner to her, she thought, was certainly very much changed, and she did not like the alteration. He was courteous always, and gentle; but he had gradually lost all that petting fondness which, from its very rarity in a man of his stamp, was so winning at first; and with his courtesy was mingled a grave sad air, which Barbara understood to mean reproach, and which galled her mightily. I do not know that Barbara at first really felt jealous of her husband: had she examined the foundation of her jealousy and sifted its causes, there is very little doubt that the natural sense which she undoubtedly possessed would have shown her that her suspicions were absurd. But the truth is, she all unwittingly rather encouraged the passion, as a relief from the monotonous misery of her life, without a thought of how rapidly it grew, or what proportions it might eventually assume. It was a change to think differently of Frank, to take a feverish interest in his proceedings and in the proceedings of those with whom he was brought into contact; and Frank himself was surprised to find how the "little low" fits had been succeeded by a more sprightly demeanour—a demeanour which showed itself in sharp glances and bitter words.

And Frank, was he happy? In truth, not one whit happier than his wife, though his wretchedness sprang from a different cause and was shown in a different way. He felt that he had clutched the great prize, and found it to be a Dead-Sea apple; that he had reached the turning-point of his career, passed it, and found the rest of

his course all down-hill; he had played the great stake of his life and lost it; and henceforward his heart's purse was empty, and he was bankrupt in affections. It had come upon him, gradually indeed, but with overwhelming force: at first he had ascribed Barbara's pettishness to the mere vagaries of a girl, and had looked upon her caprices as relics of that empire which had been hers so long, and from which she, naturally enough, was unwilling to part. He had seen, not without annoyance, indeed, but still without any deep or lasting pang, that there was an uncomfortable feeling, based either upon rivalry or some other passion equally unintelligible to him, between his wife and his mother; but he had hoped this would pass away. He had noticed that his old friends, though they spoke with warm admiration of Barbara's beauty, seemed to shirk any question of liking or being pleased with her; and that, let them meet her however often, she scarcely seemed to make any progress in their regard; but he thought this was as much their fault as hers, and that the estrangement would wear off. It was not until his mother had dropped her hint as to the frequency of Captain Lyster's visits, that Frank's mind began to be seriously disturbed; it was not until the scene at Uplands, of which he had been an unwilling spectator, and the subsequent scene with Barbara in the brougham, that he began to feel that his marriage had been a horrible mistake. Then all Barbara's "low" fits, all her silence, all the tears which he could see constantly welling up into her eyes, and kept back only by a struggle as palpable as the tears themselves; then the complaints of dulness and monotony—all poor Barbara's shortcomings, indeed, and they were not a few—were ascribed to one source. She had known this man in former days; he was of her society and set, and had probably made love to her, as had hundreds before; and Frank ground his teeth as he thought how Barbara's reputation as a flirt, and her attractive qualities as a coquette, had been kindly mentioned to him by more than one of her old friends. Some quarrel had probably occurred between them; during

which he Frank had crossed her path, had fallen at her feet,—dazed idiot that he was!—and she had raised him up, and out of pique had married him. That was the story, Frank could swear to it! he turned it over and over in his mind until he believed it implicitly, and conjured up the different scenes and passages, which made his blood boil and sent him, with set teeth and scowling brow, stamping through the long-echoing Mesopotamian squares, to the intense wonder of the policeman and the few passers-by in those dreary thoroughfares. Only when he was quite alone, however, did he in the least give way to his emotions. When he was at home—where he and Barbara would now sit for hours without exchanging a word, and where the occasional presence of a third person rendered matters more horrible, compelling them to put on a ghastly semblance of affectionate familiarity—when he was at home, or down at the *Statesman* Office, where he could be thoroughly natural, he was moody, stern, and silent. His manner had lost that round jollity which had always characterised it, and his appearance was beginning to change: he was thinner; there were silver lines in the brown hair, and two or three deep lines round the eyes.

Of course his friends noticed all this, as friends notice every thing. Madly and blindly people go through life, imagining that their thoughts and actions are—some of them, at least—known but to themselves alone; whereas all of them—all such, at least, as they would prefer keeping secret—are public property, and as thoroughly patent as if they had been proclaimed from the market-place cross. You may go on in London living for years next door to a neighbour whose name you are unacquainted with, and whom you have never seen; but make him an acquaintance, give him some interest in you, and without your in the least suspecting it, he will find out the whole story of your life, will know all about the young lady with the fair hair in Wiltshire, the hundred pounds borrowed from Robinson, the disappointment at Uncle Prendergast's will—all the little things, in fact, which you thought were buried in your own bo-

som; and will sit down opposite you at table with an innocent ingenuous face, as though your affairs were the very last things with which he would trouble himself. We all do this, day by day, with the noblest hypocrisy, and receive from our dear intimate statements of facts which we know to be false, and warpings of statements which we know to be perverted, with "Indeeds!" and "Reallys?" and head-noddings of outward acquiescence and mocking incredulity in our hearts. Barbara Churchill had been the one grand subject of conversation for the Mesopotamian gossips ever since her marriage: they had lived upon her, and found that she improved in flavour. Her appearance, her dress, her manners; what they were pleased to term her "stand-offishness;" her shortcomings as a housekeeper; her ignorance in the matter of mending under-linen; her novel-reading and piano-playing—all these had been toothsome morsels, far more enjoyable than the heavy pies, the thick chops, and the sardines which figured in that horrible Mesopotamian meal known as "a thick tea;" and had been picked to the very bone. And then, when it began to be whispered about—as it very soon did—that there were dissensions in the Churchill camp, that all did not go as smoothly as it should, and that, in fact, quarrels were rife—then came the crowning delight of the banquet, and the female portion of the Great-Adullam-Street community was nearly delirious with excitement. Although old Mrs. Churchill, from her kind-heartedness and simplicity, had always been a great favourite with her neighbours, she had no idea of the extent of her popularity until this period. Her little rooms were literally beset with female friends; and she had invitations to tea-parties three-deep. To these invitations—to as many of them, at least, as was possible—she invariably responded. By nature the old lady hated the character of a gossip, and would have been highly indignant had she been charged with any propensity for chattering; but easily impressible by those with whom she was brought into contact, she had acquired a little of the prevalent failing of the region, and moreover, she

thought it her duty to tell all she knew about the then favourite subject, in order, as she phrased it, "that poor Frank's position might be set right." But if poor Frank's position was properly looked after, it must be acknowledged that poor Barbara received her meed of popular disapprobation. Not that her mother-in-law ever said one direct word of condemnation; old Mrs. Churchill was far too good a Christian willingly to start or give currency to harsh criticism, more especially on one so closely allied to her. But it was very difficult to absolve her son from blame without shifting the onus of the avowed quarrel on to the shoulders of her daughter-in-law; and when the ladies surrounding the tea-table, groaning over "poor Mr. Churchill's" domestic woes, shook their cap-strings in virtuous indignation at her who had caused them, the old lady made but a feeble protest, which speedily closed in a string of doleful ejaculations. In the minds of the members of this Mesopotamian Vehmgericht, of which Mrs. Harding might be considered president, Barbara stood fully convicted of the charge which they had themselves brought against her. Her indolence, her carelessness, her "fal-lal ways," her pride and squeamishness had brought—only rather sooner than was expected—their natural result; and "isn't it better, my dear, to have a little less good looks and a little less fondness for jingling the piano and reading trashy novels, and keep a tidy house over your head and live happily with your husband?"

The stories of all that passed in Churchill's house, collected with care from old Mrs. Churchill and her servant Lucy,—whose habitual puritanical taciturnity was melted by the course of events, and who gave way to that hatred against Barbara which she had felt from the first moment of seeing her,—and duly dressed, illustrated, and annotated by Mrs. Harding, who had a special talent in that way, of course before long reached Mr. Harding's ears.

It is difficult to explain how that good fellow was affected by the news. He had the warmest personal re-

gard for Frank, loving him with something of paternal fondness; he had always impressed him with the propriety of marriage, and had looked forward with real anxiety to the time when he should see his friend settled for life. Not until then, he thought, would those talents which he knew Frank possessed enable him to take his proper position in the world: what he did now was well enough; but it was merely the evanescent sparkle of his genius. Soberly settled down with a woman worthy of him, the real products of his intellect and his reading would come forth, and he would step into the first rank of the men of his time. And now it had all come to this! Frank was married; but he had made a wrong selection, and was a moody, discontented, blighted man. The aspect of affairs was horrible; and when told of their real condition by his wife, George Harding determined that he would exercise his prerogative of friend, and speak to Churchill on the subject.

Accordingly the next day when he saw Frank at the usual consultation at the office, Harding waited until the other man had left the room, and then, placing his hand affectionately on his friend's shoulder, said: "I want two minutes with you, Frank."

"Two hours, if you like, Harding; it's all the same to me," replied Churchill wearily.

"I want you to tell me what ails you,—what has worked such a complete change in you, physically and morally; or rather, I don't want you to tell me, for I know."

Churchill looked up defiantly with flushed cheeks, as he exclaimed, "What do you know? are my private affairs topics for the tittle-tattle of—there, God help me! I'm weak as water. Now I want to quarrel with my best friend!"

"No, you don't, old man; and you would get no quarrel out of me, if you wished it ever so much. But I can't bear this any longer; I can't bear to see you losing your health and your spirits; and wearing yourself out day by day as you are, without coming to the

rescue. Let us look the matter boldly in the face at once. You're—you're not quite happy at home, Frank, eh?"

"Happy!" he echoed, with a strange hollow laugh; "no, not entirely perhaps."

"Well, that's a bad thing; but it's curable. At all events, giving way to moping and misery won't help it. Many men have begun their married life in wretchedness, and emerged, when they least expected it, into sunshine. Here are two young people who have not known each other above a couple of months, both of whom have very possibly been spoiled beforehand, and they arrive each with their own particular stock of whims and fancies, which they declare shall be carried out by the other. It takes time to rub down all the angles and points, and to provide for the regular working of the machinery; and it is never done by a jump. You've fine material to work upon too; if Mrs. Churchill were vulgar or uneducated, or did not care for you, you would have great difficulties to contend with. But as she is exactly the reverse of all this, she ought to be easily managed. Don't you understand that in these matters one or the other must have the upperhand? and that one should be the husband! The supremacy once asserted, all works well; not until then, and generally the struggle, though sharp, is very short. Every thing is wrong, and the whole machine is out of gear. You've let her have her own way too much, my friend. You must tighten the curb and see the result."

"If you were a horseman, Harding," said Frank with a dreary smile, "you would know that tightening the curb sometimes produces the worst of rebellious vices—rearing!"

"Oh, no fear of that; no fear of that. Try it! You really must do something, Frank; I can't bear to see you giving way like this. You must assert yourself, my good fellow, and at once; for though it may be bad now, it will be ten times worse hereafter, and you'll bitterly rue not having taken my advice."

And George Harding went home and told his wife

what he had done, and assured her that she would find matters speedily set to rights in Great Adullam Street now.

And Frank Churchill walked home, pondering on the advice he had just received and finally determining within himself to adopt it. He supposed he had been weak and wanting in proper self-respect. Harding was always the reflex of his wife's sentiments, and doubtless that whole set of wretched tabbies had been pitying him as a poor spiritless creature. He would take Harding's advice and bring the matter to an issue at once.

He went into his little study and had just seated himself at his desk to commence his work when Barbara entered the room. She was dressed in her bonnet and shawl; her eyes were swollen, and there were traces of recent tears still on her cheeks; the muscles round her mouth were working visibly, and her whole frame was quivering with excitement. As she closed the door behind her, she seemed to control herself with one great effort, then walking straight to the desk she said, in a broken and trembling voice, "I want you to answer me a question."

"Barbara!" said Frank, whose intended firmness had all melted away before her haggard appearance, "Barbara!" and he rose and put out his hand to draw her to him.

"Don't touch me!" she screamed, starting back. "Don't lay one finger upon me until—until you have answered my question. This morning you left this envelope on the dressing-table; tell me who is the writer and what were the contents."

She tossed an envelope on to the desk as she spoke, and leant with one hand against the wall.

"That envelope," said Frank, speaking very slowly, "is mine. I utterly deny your right to ask me any thing about it; I utterly refuse to satisfy your curiosity."

"Curiosity! it is not that; God knows it is not that feeling merely that prompts me. This is the second time you have, to my knowledge, received letters in that writ-

ing. The first time was at Bissett, when you left suddenly, immediately after its receipt. I suspected then, but had no right to ask; now I have the right, and I demand to know!"

"I can only repeat what I said before: I most positively decline to tell you."

"Beware, Frank! You ought to know me by this time; but you don't. If you don't satisfy me on this point, I leave you for ever."

"You have your answer," said Frank; "now let me get to my work."

"You still refuse?"

"You heard what I said."

She drew herself up and left the room; the next minute he heard the street-door shut, and, running to the dining-room window, saw her hail a cab and get into it.

"There's the first lesson, at all events," said he to himself. "When she comes back to dinner, she will be cooler, and more amenable to reason."

He finished his work, and walked down with it to the *Statesman* Office. On his return he found a commissionaire in the hall talking to his servant. He asked the latter where her mistress was, but the girl said she had not come in, at the same time handing him a letter.

It was very brief; it merely said:

"You have decided; and henceforth you and I never meet again. Mrs. Schröder, with whom I am staying, will send her maid for a box which I have left ready packed. I hope you may be more happy with your correspondent, and in your return to your old life, than you have been with
B. C."

As Frank Churchill read this, the lines wavered before his eyes, and he reeled against the wall.

CHAPTER XXIX.

MR. SCADGERS PAYS A VISIT.

THOSE who had been most intimately acquainted with Mr. Scadgers of Newman Street had never known him under any circumstances devote a portion of his valuable time to sacrificing to the Graces. He was popularly supposed to sleep in his clothes; and as those garments were seldom entirely free from fluff or "flue," there were probably some grounds for the supposition; but he could not have slept in his big high-boots, though no one had ever seen him without them, save Jinks. Jinks had more than once seen his master with slippered feet, and trembled; for Mr. Scadgers' boots were to him what those other Ingoldsby-celebrated boots were to the Baron Ralph de Shurland, what his hair was to Samson, what his high-heels were to Louis Quatorze. Without his boots, Mr. Scadgers was quite a different man; he talked of "giving time," of "waiting a day or two," of "holding-off a bit;" this was in his slippers: but when once his boots were on, in speaking of the same debtor he told Jinks to "sell him up slick, and clear off all his sticks." He always seemed to wear the same suit of black, and all the washing that he was ever known to indulge in was by smearing himself with the damp corner of a towel, which he kept in the office between the chemist's bottles, one of which held the water; while his toilette was completed by running a pocket-comb through his close-cropped hair, and then smoothing it down with the palms of his hands, whisking his boots with his red-silk pocket-handkerchief, and putting sharp spiky points to

his nails by the aid of a vicious-looking buck-handled penknife.

Thoroughly accustomed to his patron's appearance, Jinks was, then, struck with wonderment on beholding him one morning enter the office in comparatively gorgeous array. Through the folds of a white waistcoat there protruded a large shirt-frill, certainly of rather a yellow hue, and not so neat in the plaits as it ought to have been, but for all that an undeniable frill, such as adorned the breasts of the dandies of the last generation; his usual napless greasy hat had been discarded for a very elegant article in white beaver, which had apparently been the property of some other gentleman, and acquired by its present owner in that species of commercial transaction known as a "swop," as it was much too large for Mr. Scadgers, and obliterated every sign of his hair, while a corner of the red-silk pocket-handkerchief fell out gracefully over the back of his head. In his hand Mr. Scadgers carried one damp black-beaver glove, and a thick stick like an elongated ruler, with a silver top and a silk tassel. Mr. Jinks was so overpowered at this apparition that he sat gazing with open mouth at his master, unable to speak a word; he had one comfort, however,—Mr. Scadgers had his boots on, so that under all this frivolity there lurked an intention of stern business.

Mr. Scadgers took no notice of his subordinate's astonishment; but placing the glove and the stick on his desk, taking off the white hat, and having a thorough mopping with the red-silk pocket-handkerchief, looked through his letters, and proceeded to indorse them, for Jinks to answer, in his usual business way. Some of his correspondence amused him, for he smiled and shook his head at the letter in a waggish way, as though the writer were chaffing him; in glancing over another he would lay his finger alongside his nose and mutter, "No, no, my boy! not by no means, no how!" while at others his larger eye would gleam ferociously, the upper corner of his mouth would twist higher than ever, and he would

shake his fist at the paper and utter words not pleasant to hear. His mental emotions did not, however, interfere with his business habits: as he finished each letter he wrote the substance of his reply on the back for Jinks to copy, drew three or four cheques, which he also handed over to his factotum, and locked away some flimsy documents which had formed the contents of certain of the letters, in his cash-box. Some of the letters received by that morning's post had contained bank-notes, and these Mr. Scadgers examined most scrupulously before putting them away, holding them between his eyes and the light to examine the water-mark, carefully scrutinising the engraving, and finally comparing the numbers, dates, and ciphers, with the list contained in a printed bill pasted against the inside of his desk-lid headed "Stolen." Over one of the notes, after comparing it with this list, Mr. Scadgers chuckled vastly.

"90275 LB January 12! there you are correct to a T. I thought they'd turn up about this time. I say, Jinks, here's one of the notes as was stolen from Robarts's; you recollect? Come up from Doncaster in renewal-fee from Honourable Capting Maitland. He took it over the Leger, no doubt: they always thought at Scotland Yard that that was the way those notes would get put off; and they was right. Send this back to the capting, Jinks,—he's gone back to Leeds barracks now,—and tell him all about it; we can't have that, you know; might get us into trouble; and if he wants a renewal, he must send another. He won't know where he got it from, bless you! reg'lar careless cove as ever was; he ain't due till Friday, and he's sent up to-day in a reg'lar fright. You must step round to Moss's and tell 'em to proceed in Hetherington's matter. There's a letter there from Sir Mordaunt, askin' for more time, and promisin' all sorts of things; but I'm sick of him and his blather. Tell Moss to put the screw on, and he'll pay up fast enough. Write a line to young Sewell, and tell him he can have 125/, and the rest in madeiry. He's in Scotland; you'll find his address in the book,—

Killy-something; say the wine can be sent to the Albany; but I won't do it in any other way. Any one been in this morning?"

"Only Sharp, from Parkinson's," said Mr. Jinks, who was already deep in letter-writing.

"Well," said his principal, "what did he want?"

"He came to know if you'd be in another two hundred for Mr. Beresford," replied Jinks, looking up from his work. "He's been hit at Doncaster, and wants the money most immediate."

"Then he won't get it from me," said Mr. Scadgers; "I won't have no more of his paper, at no price. He's up to his neck already, is Mr. Beresford; and that old aunt of his don't mean dying yet, from all I hear."

"There's the bishop," suggested Jinks.

"Oh, blow the bishop! He might be bled on the square, but he'd turn precious rusty if he thought it was stiff he was paying for. No, no; Master Beresford's taking lodgings in Queer Street, I fancy; Parkinson holds more of his paper than you think of, and if he wants to go deeper, he must go by himself; I won't be in it."

"All right," said Jinks; "I'll put a cross against his name in the books. Rittman's boy looked in to see if his father could have two pounds till Saturday. I told him to call again this afternoon."

"Till Saturday," said Scadgers with a grin. "You never see such a Saturday as that'll be, Jinks. Poor devil! there's nothing but the carcass left there; and he's worked well too, and brought us plenty of custom, though not of the best sort. Let the boy have a sovereign when he comes, Jinks, and tell him if his father don't pay, I'll put him in prison; not that he'll mind that one dump. Oh, by the way, give me all the paper of young Prescott's that you've got by you."

Mr. Jinks opened a large iron safe let into the wall just behind his stool, and from a drawer therein took out a bundle of tape-tied papers. From this he selected four, and as he handed them over to his principal, said, "Here

they are; two with Pringle, one with Compton, and one I O U.,—total, one seventy-five. I was going to ask you what you intended to do about them. The young feller was here yesterday wanting to see you, and looking regularly down upon his luck."

"Ah," said Scadgers, "there's something up about them—what, I don't know; but I'm a-goin' on that business now. I shall be away for an hour or two, Jinks."

"You ain't a-goin' to get married, are you, Mr. Scadgers?" asked the little old man with a look of alarm; "it would never do to bring a female into the concern."

Scadgers laughed outright. "Married! no, you old fool, not I. Can't a man put on a bit of finery"—here he smoothed the yellow shirt-frill with his grimy fingers—"without your supposing there's a woman in the case? However, I'm goin' to call upon a lady, and that's the truth; but all in a matter of business. Hand over them bills of Prescott's, and don't expect me till you see me."

So saying, Mr. Scadgers took the bills from Jinks and placed them in his fat pocket-book, which he buttoned into the breast-pocket of his frock-coat, gave himself a good mopping with the red-silk pocket-handkerchief before throwing it into the big white hat, and placing that elegant article on his head, took up the one damp glove and the ruler-like stick, and went out.

A consciousness of the shirt-frill, or the hat, or both, pervaded Mr. Scadgers' mind as he walked through the streets, and gave him an air very different from that which usually characterised his business perambulations. He seemed to feel that he was calling upon the passers-by for observation and notice; and certainly the passers-by seemed to respond to the appeal. Ribald boys stuck the red-covered books of domestic household expenditure which they carried into their breasts, and swaggered by with heads erect; others openly expressed their opinion that it was "all dicky" with him; while a more impudent few suggested that he had stolen the "guv'nor's tile," or borrowed his big brother's hat; nor were the suggestions that he was a barber's clerk out for a holiday

wanting on the part of the youthful populace. In an ordinary way Mr. Scadgers was thoroughly proof against the most cutting chaff: the most terrific things had been said about his boots, and he had remained adamant; drunken men had requested permission to light their pipes at his nose, and he had never winced; in allusion to his swivel-eye, boys had asked him to look round the corner and tell them what o'clock it was, without ruffling his temper in the smallest degree. But in the present instance he felt in an abnormal state; he knew that there was ground for the satire which was being poured out upon him, and he fled into the first omnibus for concealment. He rode to the utmost limits of the omnibus-journey, and when he alighted he had still a couple of miles to walk to his destination. He inquired his way and set out manfully. The weather was magnificent; one of those early October days when, though the sun's rays are a little tempered of their burning heat, and the air has a freshness which it has not known for months, the country yet wears a summer aspect. Mr. Scadgers' way lay along a high-road, on either side of which were fields: now huge yellow patches shorn of their produce, and, while awaiting the ploughshare, looking like the clean-shaved faces of elderly gentlemen; now broken up into rich loam furrows driven through by the puffing snorting engine which has supplanted the patient Dobbin, the handle-holding labourer, and whip-cracking boy of our childhood, and against which Mr. Tennyson's Northern farmer inveighed with such bitterness. Far away on the horizon lay a broad wooded belt, broken in the centre, where two tall trees, twining their topmost branches together, formed a kind of natural arch, and beyond which one expected—absurdly enough—to find the sea. The road was quiet enough; a few carts, laden with farm-produce or manure, crept lazily along it; now and then a carrier's wagon, drawn by a heavily-trotting horse with bells on his collar, jolted by, or the trap of a town-traveller returning from the home-circuit, driven by an ill-dressed hobbledehoy with the traveller nodding

by his side, and the black-leather apron strapped over the back seat, to make the trap look as much like a phaeton as possible, rattled townward. But when, in obedience to the directions on a finger-post, Mr. Scadgers turned out of the high-road up a long winding lane, fringed on either side by high hedges, on which "Autumn's fiery finger" had been laid only to increase their beauty a thousand-fold, where not a sound broke the stillness save his own footfall and the occasional chirping of the birds, he seemed for the first time to awake to the beauty of the scene. Climbing to the top bar of a gate in the hedge on the top of a little eminence, he seated himself, took off the big hat, mopped himself violently with the red-silk handkerchief, and looked round on the panorama of meadow and woodland, with tiny silver threads of water here and there interspersed, until his heart softened and he had occasion to rub the silver head of the ruler-like stick into his eyes.

"Lor' bless me!" he muttered to himself; "it's like Yorkshire, and yet prettier than that; softer and quieter like. More than twenty years since I've seen any thing like this. And poor Ann! Daisy-chains we used to make in Fairlow's mead, just like that field there, when we was little children; daisy-chains and buttercups, and — poor Ann! And to think what I'm now a-goin' to — Lord help us! well, it *is* a rum world!" with which sage though incoherent reflections Mr. Scadgers resumed the big hat, dismounted from the gate, and continued his walk.

As he proceeded up the lane, he began to take particular notice of the objects by which he was more immediately surrounded; and on hearing the tramp of hoofs he peered through the hedge, and saw strings of horses, each mounted by its groom, at exercise. At these animals Mr. Scadgers looked with a by no means uncritical eye, and seemed satisfied, for he muttered, "Good cattle and plenty of 'em too; looks like business that. Wise head she has; I knew it *would* turn out all right." When he arrived at the lodge, he stopped in

front of the gates and looked scrutinisingly about him, then rang the bell, and stared hard but pleasantly at the buxom woman who stood curtsying with the gate in her hand. Inside, Mr. Scadgers noticed that every thing looked neat and prosperous; he did not content himself with going straight up the carriage-drive, but diverged across the lodge-keeper's garden, and peered into the little farmyard, where the mastiff came out of his kennel to scan the stranger, and where two or three helpers, lounging on the straw-ride, or polishing bits as they leant against the stable-doors, mechanically knuckled their foreheads as he passed by. Arriving at the house, Mr. Scadgers found the front-door open; but a pull at the bell brought a staid, middle-aged woman (Kate Mellon, for it was The Den which Mr. Scadgers was visiting, never could stand what she called "flaunting hussies," as servants), by whom he was ushered into the pretty little hall, hung with its antlers, its foxes' brushes, and its sporting picture, and into the dining-room. There he was left by himself to await the coming of the owner of the house.

Now Mr. Scadgers, though by no means a nervous or impressible man, seemed on this occasion to have lost his ordinary calm, and to be in a very excitable state. He laid the big hat carefully on the table, refreshed himself with a thorough mop with the red-silk handkerchief, and rubbed his hands through his stubbly black hair; then he walked up and down the room, alternately sucking the silver head of the ruler-like stick, and muttering incoherencies to himself, and ever and anon he would stop short in his perambulations and glance at the door with an air almost of fright. The door at length was opened with a bang, and Kate Mellon entered the room. The skirt of her dress was looped up, and showed a pair of red-striped stockings and large, though well-shaped, thick Balmoral boots; she had a driving-whip in one hand and on the other a strong dogskin gauntlet, stretched and stained. Her face was flushed, her eyes bright, and the end of her hair was just escaping

from the light knot into which it had been bound. With a short nod to her visitor, at whose personal appearance she gave a glance of astonishment, she began the conversation by asking what his pleasure was.

If Mr. Scadgers' behaviour had been somewhat peculiar before her entrance, it was now ten times more remarkable. At first he stood stock-still with his mouth open, gazing at her with distended eyes; then he fell to nodding his head violently and rubbing his hands as if thoroughly delighted, and then looked her up and down as though he were mentally appraising each article of dress.

"What's the man up to?" said Kate, after undergoing a minute of this inspection; "come, none of this tomfoolery here. What do you want?"

Recalled to himself by the sharp tone in which these words were uttered, Mr. Scadgers fell into his usual state, bowed, and said he had called by appointment.

"By appointment?" said Kate; "oh, ah, I recollect now. You overcharged me for two horses and a dog in the list for last year. I filled up your form-thing fairly enough; why didn't you go by that?"

"Two horses and a dog!" repeated Mr. Scadgers. "There's some mistake, miss; my name's Scadgers."

"Lord, that is a good 'un!" said Kate, dropping the whip and clapping her hands in an ecstasy of laughter. "I thought you were the man about the taxes that I've sent for to come to me, too. So your name's Scadgers, is it? I've heard of you, sir; you get your living in a queer way."

"Pretty much the same as you and the rest of the world, I believe," said Scadgers, pleasantly;—"by the weakness of human natur'!"

"Which you take a pretty considerable advantage of, eh?"

"Well, I don't know: a gent wants money and he hears I've got it, and he comes to me for it. I don't seek him,—he seeks me; I tell him what he'll have to pay for it, and he agrees. He has the money, and he

don't return it; and when he goes through the Court and it all comes out, people cry, 'Oh, Scadgers again! oh, the bloodsucker! here's iniquity!' and all the rest of the gammon. If people wants luxuries, miss, they must pay for 'em, as you know well enough."

This was not said in the least offensively, but in a quiet earnest manner, as though the man had real belief in what he stated, and saw no harm in the calling he was defending. Kate, who had a pretty shrewd knowledge of character, saw this at once, and felt more kindly disposed to her new acquaintance than she had at first.

"Well," she said, "what's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander, they say; and it's not my business to preach to you, and you wouldn't heed it if I did. I got you to come here on business. You hold some acceptances of Mr. James Prescott's?"

"That's true, miss; I've got 'em here in my pocket-book."

"What's the amount?"

"The total, one seventy-five; cab-hire and loss of time, say one seventy-five ten six."

"Hand them over, and I'll write you a cheque."

"Well," said Mr. Scadgers, slowly, "we don't generally take cheques in these matters,—it ain't business; they mightn't be paid, you know,—but I don't mind doing it for you."

Something in the tone of this last sentence which struck oddly on Kate Mellon's ear,—a soft tender tone of almost parental affection; a tone which seemed to bring back memory of past days. She looked up hurriedly, but Mr. Scadgers' swivel-eye was fixed on the wall above her head; and in the rest of his countenance there was no more emotion visible than on the face of a Dutch clock. Kate Mellon took out her desk and wrote the cheque.

"There!" she said, handing it to him,—“there's your money; hand over the bills. All right! Now, two things more. One, you'll swear never to let Mr. Prescott know w^ho paid this money. Good! The other, if

ever he comes to you for help again—I don't think he will, mind; but if he does—you'll refuse him, and let me know."

"That's what they all say," said Mr. Scadgers, "'if they come again, refuse 'em;' and they do come again, and I don't refuse 'em,—that is if I think they're good for the money,—but I'll swear I'll do it for you."

"I believe you," said Kate, simply. "Now, have some lunch before you go."

"No, thank you," said Scadgers, "no lunch; but I should like a glass of wine to drink your health in."

"You shall have it, and welcome," said she, ringing the bell; "and I'll have one with you, for I was at the dumb-jockey business when you came in, and it rather takes it out of one."

When the wine was brought, Kate filled two glasses, and, taking up one, nodded to Mr. Scadgers. "Here's luck," said she, shortly. Mr. Scadgers took his glass, and said; "The best of luck to you in every thing, and God bless you, my—miss, I mean! And now, I've heard a lot about your stable and place—would you mind my going round them, before I go?"

"Mind!" said Kate; "I'll take you myself." And they walked into the farm together.

"It was as much as I could do," said Mr. Scadgers to himself, as, half an hour afterwards, he walked down the lane on his way back to town—"it was as much as I could do to prevent throwing my arms round her neck and telling her all about it. What a pretty creetur' it is; and what spirit! I suppose she's nuts on young Prescott, and they'll be gettin' married. Lord! that would be a rum start if he ever knew—but he won't know, nor any of 'em; we shall never let on. Woman of business too; keeps accounts I noticed, when she opened her desk; and all the place in such order; kept as neat as a drawing-room those stables. Well, that's one thing you did right, John Scadgers, and one you won't be sorry for some day."

"That's a queer customer," said Kate to herself, as she stood in the lane by the lodge-gate, looking after his receding figure. "A very queer customer. What a grip he gave my hand when he said good-by! My fingers ache with it still. And there was no nonsense about him; I could see that in a minute. Where have I seen him before? I've some sort of recollection of him; but I can't fit it to any thing particular—he's not in the horse-line, and he's not a swell; so I don't see where I can have come across him. Glad he looked in this morning, for I was precious dull: I can't make out what this weight is that's hanging over me for the last few days, just as though something was going to happen. I think another glass of Madeira would do me good; but I promised Simnel I'd knock that off. I wonder what's come of Simnel for the last few days. That old Scadgers seemed to know something about this place, noticed the alterations in the five-acre meadow; and when I asked him, said he remembered the place when it was Myrtle Farm. I must ask Simnel about him, he—Lord, how depressed and stupid I feel again!" She turned back and fastened the gate after her. One of the gatekeeper's chubby children came running out to meet her, and she caught the little thing up in her arms, and carried it into the lodge. As she was putting it down she heard the tramp of horses' feet, and raising her head, looked through the window. The next instant her cheeks flushed scarlet; she dropped the child into a chair, and rushing to the gate, threw it open, and stood gazing down the road.

Yes, it was he! no mistaking his figure, even if she had not recognised the horse. It was he riding so close to the lady by his side, bending over her and looking down into her upturned face. So preoccupied that he never even bestowed a glance upon the place so well known to him, so frequently visited in bygone days. And she, who was she? Kate could see that she was slim, could see her fair hair gathered in a knot beneath her hat,—it must be the woman of whom Simnel had

spoken. And Kate Mellon gave a loud groan, and clenched her nails into the palms of her hands, and stood looking after them with quivering lips and a face as pale as death.

Just at that moment two grooms came riding round the corner, side by side. The sound of their horses' feet recalled Kate to herself. She looked up, and in one of them recognised Beresford's man. She collected herself by a great effort, and beckoned to him. The man saw her, touched his hat, and rode up at once, leaving his companion to proceed by himself.

"William," said Kate, "who's that lady riding with your master?"

"Mrs. Schröder, miss; Saxe-Coburg Square. Mr. Schröder drives pair of chestnuts, miss, in mail-pheay-ton, plain black harness. May have noticed 'em; often in the Park, miss."

"Ah! No; I think not. Schröder,—Saxe-Coburg Square, you said?"

"Yes, miss. Beg pardon, miss," added the man, who had himself been formerly in Kate's service, and by whom, as by all of his fraternity, she was adored,—beg pardon, miss; but nothing wrong, is there? You're looking uncommon ill, miss."

"No," said Kate, with a ghastly smile. "I'm all right, thank you, William. Good-day: ride on!" and William, touching his hat, clapped spurs to his horse, and rode off.

That night the mail-cart was waiting outside the little village post-office, and the old woman was just huddling the letters into the bag, when a groom came up at a hand-gallop, and dismounting, gave in a letter, saying,

"Just in time, Mrs. Mallins, I think!"

The old woman peered at him over her spectacles.

"Oh, it's you, Thomas, is it? Well, I'll take a letter from your mistress, though I'm not bound to do it by the reg'lations. You're after time, Thomas."

"I know, Mrs. Mallins ; but Miss Kate said 'twere most particular. And I were to tell you so, and—"

"Air you comin' with that bag?" growled the mail-cart driver, putting his head into the shop.

"All right, my man ! all right !" said the old lady, handing him the bag. "There it is. Thomas, you can tell your lady she was in time."

Half an hour afterwards Kate Mellon's servant looked into the dining-room. There was no light, and she was about to withdraw, when she heard her mistress's voice say, "What is it?"

"Oh, nothing, ma'am ; only Thomas says the letter was in time."

"Very well," said Kate. Then, when the door was shut again, she muttered between her clenched teeth : "It's done now, and can't be undone ! Now, Master Charley, look out for yourself !"

CHAPTER XXX.

AFTER THE STORM.

As you sit in the bow-window of your comfortable lodging at your favourite watering-place during your annual autumn holiday, your breakfast finished and the *débris* removed, the newspaper rustling idly on your knees, and the first and pleasantest pipe of the day between your lips, you look up and see the aspect of affairs in the little street below very much changed from its normal state. The pleasure-boats—the *Lively Nancy*, which sails so regularly at eleven A.M. with a cargo of happy excursionists, and which arrives in port at irregular intervals varying from one to three, laden with leaden-coloured men and hopelessly-bedraggled fainting women; the *William and Ellen*, in which you go out to catch codling and plaice; and all the other little craft usually stationed on the beach—have been bodily removed, their owners and touters are drinking rum and smoking shag-tobacco in evil-smelling little public-houses, and their customers have no notion of putting them into requisition. The bathing-machines,—those cumbrous vehicles in which you have so often made that dread journey into the ocean, after being bidden to “stand by” while the horse gives his first awful jerk and afterwards dashes you against the sides of your travelling-prison, while you catch horribly-distorted glimpses of your wretched countenance in the miserable little sixpenny looking-glass pendant from the rusty nail and swinging here and there like a live thing convulsed,—the bathing-machines have all been dragged from the spot where they ordinarily stand like a row of hideous guardians of the coast,

and have defiantly taken possession of one side of the little main street. The place where the German band subsidised by the town usually pours forth its perpetual iteration of the "Faust" waltz is now covered with roaring plunging waves, thick brown walls of water rearing their white crests a hundred yards off, as if in survey of their ultimate goal, tearing madly onward, gathering in size and strength at every stride, and at length discharging themselves with a thunder-crash in a blinding avalanche of spray. These waves, this roaring seething mass of trembling turgid water, is the great attraction to-day. In vain the monkey on the three-legged table clashes his cymbals, or plies the ramrod of his gun with frantic energy; in vain the good-looking Italian boy, his master, shows his gleaming teeth or touches his hat to attract attention; in vain the Highlander blows discord into his bagpipes until all the neighbouring dogs possessing musical ears are howling in misery. Nobody cares for anything but the sea to-day; the little parade is thronged with visitors all gazing seaward, all rapt in attention on the boiling waters; at one point, where the waves dash in and sweep over the solid masonry, boys rush in between the ebb and flow, returning happy if they have escaped, happier if they have been soaked by the spray. People look out all round and scan the horizon to see if there be any craft in sight, inspired with that singular feeling which only Rochefoucauld has dared to define, the feeling which sends crowds to watch Blondin's walk upon the high-rope, or the performances of a lion-tamer,—the feeling which, in a lesser extent, originates the sensation-loving element in us, and which is about the lowest in degraded human nature. Far away, at the end of the worm-eaten sea-besoaked jetty, is a little cluster of fishermen in dread-naught and sou'-westers, patiently watching the weather, which to them is no toy nor amusement, but that on which hang their hopes of daily bread; and they will tell you if you ask them, that these big breakers thundering on to the shore are the result of some great storm

that has taken place far away in the heart of the Atlantic ; and that though the tempest is probably over now, these creations of its fury, these evidences of its wrath, will continue to roll and surge and foam for days to come.

So it was with the Adullam-Street household and its surroundings. The storm that had swept through it had been short, sharp, and decisive; but the traces of its wrecking power were visible long, long after it had past.

At first it seemed quite impossible for Frank Churchill to understand the extent of the misery which had fallen upon him. However roseate might have been the dreams, in which he had indulged, of the blisses of matrimony, he had lived too long in the world not to know that few indeed were the couples whose lives were not checkered by some occasional difference. These, he had been told, generally occurred in the early portion of a matrimonial career, while the two persons were each unaccustomed to the peculiarities of the other, and while ignorance was, to a great extent, supported and backed up by obstinacy and pride. The unwillingness of each to give way would eventually result in a clash, whence would arise one of those domestic differences popularly known as "tiffs," in which the actors, though horribly wretched in themselves and disagreeable to each other, were supremely ridiculous to the rest of the world, which either affected to be blind or sympathising, and in either case was sniggering in its sleeve at the absurdity of the scene. But these little sparring-matches were usually of short duration; and though a constant repetition of them might have a tritulating effect upon the original foundation of love and constancy, yet Churchill had noticed that long before such a fatal result occurred, the sharp angles and points had generally become gradually rounded off and rubbed down, and the machine had begun to work harmoniously and with regularity. At all events no open scandal took place. That open scandal, if not an actual healer of wounds, is a rare anodyne to impulsive spirits and hearts, thumping painfully against

the tightened chain which day by day, with corroding teeth, is eating its way into their core. Exposure, publicity in the press, Mrs. Grundy—these are the greatest enemies of the Divorce-Court lawyers; heavy though the list of cases standing over for hearing may be, it would be fifty times heavier could the proceedings be kept secret. Hundreds of couples now living together, hating each other “with the hate of hell;” scowling, carping, badgering, wearing, maddening, to desperation driving, from the hour they rise till the hour they retire to rest and fall asleep,—the one cursing his life, the other feebly bemoaning her fate, or openly defiant, “each going their own way;” a state of being more horrible, loathsome, and pitiable even than the other,—would be disunited, were it not for the public scandal. “For the sake of the children,” for the scandal which would be entailed on their offspring, Mrs. Emilia will not leave Mr. Iago; and so they continue to live together, while the children are daily edified spectators of the manner in which their father treats their mother, and listen to the constantly-renewed expression of Mrs. Emilia’s wish in reference to the possession of that whip with which to lash the rascal (their father) naked through the world.

The exposure—the public scandal! To no one had these words more terror in their sound than to Frank Churchill. All his life he had shrunk from every chance of notoriety: had gloried in being able to work anonymously; not for the sake of shirking any responsibility, not from the slightest doubt of the right and truth and purity of whatever cause he might be advocating: but because, when he had shot his bolt, and hit his mark, as he generally did, he could stand calmly by and mark the result, without being deafened by empty pæans or sickened by false flattery. His horror of publicity had been extreme; he had invariably refused all details of his history to contemporary biographers, and had never been so deeply disgusted as when he saw some of his work tracked home to its author by the gossiping correspondent of a provincial paper. It was good work, too—

work creditable to his brain and his heart; yet had it been penny-a-lining written to order, he could not have been more annoyed at being accredited with it. And now the full garish eye of day was to be let into the inmost recesses of his heart's sanctuary! "Break lock and seal, betray the trust!" let the whole world revel in the details. A domestic scandal, and one besmirching a man who, despite of himself, had made some name in the world, and a woman whose triumphs had rung through society, was exactly the thing which the "many-headed beast" would most delight in prying into and bandying about. The details?—there were no details; none, at least, which the world would ever hear of, or which would give the smallest explanation of the result. There was the fact of the separation, and nothing more; what led to it must be the work of conjecture, and people would invent all kinds of calumny about him; and—great Heaven!—about her. The lying world, with its blistering tongue, would be busy with her name, warping, twisting, inventing every thing—perhaps imputing shame to her, to her whose shield he should have been, to her whom he should have protected from every blow.

And here must be exhibited one of the flaws in Frank Churchill's by-no-means-perfect character. His wife had taken a step which nothing could excuse, had given way to her passion; and, in obedience to the promptings of rage and jealousy, had done him an irreparable wrong; and covered them both with a reproach which would cling to them for life,—all this without any thing like adequate provocation on his part; so that he had been shamefully treated, and, had he been properly heroic, would have a fair claim upon your compassion, if not your admiration. But the truth is he was anything but a hero; notwithstanding the manner in which his hopes had been blighted and his life wrecked, notwithstanding his having been deserted in that apparently heartless way by his wife,—he loved her even then with a passionate devotion; and when he thought of her, perhaps vilified and calumniated, without her natural protector,

wretched and perhaps solitary, he had almost determined to fling his pride—nay, what he knew to be his duty—to the winds, to rush after her and implore her to come back to his home, and to do with him what she would. Of course nothing could have been more degrading to him than such a proceeding, and it was fortunate that good advice was coming to him in the person of his mother.

Coming in to pay her usual afternoon visit, the old lady walked straight to the study, and after tapping lightly at the door with her parasol-handle, she opened it and went in. She found her son seated at his desk, his head buried in his hands, which were supported by the projecting arms of the chair. His legs were stretched out before him, and he seemed lost in thought. He did not change his position at his mother's entrance, not until she addressed him by name; when, on raising his head, she saw the dull whiteness of his cheeks, and the bistre rings round his eyes. She noticed too that his hands shook, and on touching them they were hot and dry.

"My boy," said the old lady, gently, "you're not well, I'm afraid! what's the matter with you? too much of this horrid work, or—why, good God, Frank, there are marks of tears on your face! What *is* the matter,—what *has* happened?"

"Nothing, mother,—nothing to me at least,—don't be alarmed, dearest; I'm all right enough."

"Then Barbara's ill?" said Mrs. Churchill, rising from the seat she had taken. "I'll go to her at once, poor thing—"

"You wouldn't find her, mother!" said Frank, in a very hollow voice. "She's not upstairs; she's gone!"

"Gone! Gone where?" asked the old lady.

"Gone away—left me—gone away for ever!" and as the thought of his desolation broke with renewed force upon him, his voice nearly failed him, and it was with great difficulty that he prevented himself from breaking down.

"Left you—gone away—eloped!" cried the old lady, in whose mind there suddenly arose a vision of a yellow post-chaise, with four horses and two postillions, and Barbara inside, with Captain Lyster looking out of the window.

"No, no; not so bad as that," said Frank; "though horrible enough, in all conscience;" and he gave his mother a description of the scene which had occurred.

As Mrs. Churchill listened, it was plain to see that she was greatly moved; her hands trembled, and tears burst from her eyes and stole down her cheeks. As the story proceeded, two feelings were struggling for the mastery within her—one, pity for her son; the other, indignation at her son's wife. The old lady, although now so quiet and retiring and simple, had lived in the world, and knew the ways and doings, the inns and outs, of its denizens. She had had tolerable experience of man's inconstancy, of his proneness to sin, of his exposure to flattery, and liability to temptation. Had Frank confessed some slight flirtation with a pretty girl, some beneficence towards a female acquaintance of bygone times, she would have thought that Barbara had acted with worse than rashness in taking so decided a step; but now, when Frank told her that the letter which had provoked the final eruption was one which—had he not been pledged by its writer to be silent concerning, pledge given long before he had made Barbara's acquaintance—might have been read before the world, she believed her son fully, and could form no judgment too severe on Barbara's conduct. She was no vain-glorious Pharisee, to tell of the tithes she had given, the good she had done; no humbler-minded sinner poured out a nightly tale of shortcomings and omissions to the Great Father: but when she thought of her own married life, when she recollected all Vance Churchill's frailties, all his drinking bouts and intrigues, all his carelessness and idleness, his neglect of his wife, his pettish waywardness, and constant self-indulgence; when she compared all this with Frank's calm, steady, laborious, good life, and recollected that

under all her provocation her husband had scarcely so much as a harsh word from her, she felt that Barbara's conduct had been outrageous indeed.

She said nothing at first, though her heart was full. With the tears rolling down her cheeks, she rose from her chair, and, taking up her position by her son, fell to smoothing his hair and passing her hand lightly over his brow, as she had done—oh, how many thousand times!—when he was a child; muttering softly, "My poor boy! oh, my poor boy!" The gentler spirit which had taken possession of Frank just before his mother's entrance grew and expanded under her softening touch. He felt like some swimmer who, after a prolonged buffet with the angry waves, feels his feet, and knows that a few more strokes will bring him rest and home. There was a chance of nipping this wretched scandal in its bud, which was much; there was a chance of bringing his beloved to his side once more, which was all in all. After a time he broke the silence, cautiously sounding the depths.

"Do you think there's any chance of this horrible business being put straight, mother?" he asked.

"We are in the hands of God, my boy," replied the old lady, fervently. "Time is the great anodyne. He may think fit to have it all set right in the course of time."

"Yes; but—I mean—you don't think it could be settled at once—to-night, I mean?"

"If she were to come back to-night, which she will not, and confess that her miserable pride and jealousy had driven her forth in a mad fit, and were to ask pardon, and be as she ought to be—God knows—humble and contrite, I would say let there be an end of it; forget it all, and strive to live happier for the future. But if she remains away to-night—well, I don't know what to say;" and the old lady heaved a very intelligible sigh—a sigh which meant that in such an event the worst had arrived.

"Yes," said Frank; his mind still dwelling on the

little course he had proposed to himself,—“yes, of course, you don’t think it would be right, then, to go to her—”

“Go to her!” echoed the old lady.

“Yes, go to her, and tell her how utterly wrong she had been—that there was not the slightest foundation for her suspicions; and that she had acted most unjustifiably in quitting her husband’s house in the manner she has done; and—”

Old Mrs. Churchill had been sitting as if petrified, with her lips wide apart, during the delivery of this sentence; at this point she thawed into speech.

“Are you mad, Frank? has your misfortune turned your brain? You propose to go to her,—this woman, who has brought contempt on you—and not only on you, on me and all our name,—and sue to her to come back, and box her ears playfully, and tell her what a naughty girl she has been! Do you imagine that this affair is any longer a secret, that it has not been talked over already between Mrs. Schröder’s maid and your servants, between your servants and the tradespeople? Don’t you know that if your wife is absent from your house to-night, the doubt will become a certainty, and that to-morrow the whole neighbourhood will be ringing with it? No!” continued the old lady; “it has come, and we must bear it. If that wicked girl—for I can’t help feeling and saying that she is wicked in her present course—sees her error and repents, it will be your duty to forgive her and to take her back; but as to your humbling yourself by going to her and asking her to return, it’s not to be thought of for a moment.”

“I suppose you’re right, mother,” was all that Frank said—“I suppose you’re right: we’ll wait and see whether she comes back to-night.”

So they waited, mother and son, through that long evening. The day died out, and the dusk came down, and the lamps were lighted in the streets, and the pattering feet grew fewer and fewer; and still those two sat without speaking, without moving, immersed in their own thoughts; and still no Barbara returned. At length Mrs.

Churchill, remembering that her son had had no dinner that day, grew tenderly solicitous about his health, and, crossing to him, raised his head and pressed her lips to his, and begged him to rouse himself and eat. And Frank, who felt himself gradually going mad with the one sad strain upon his thoughts, said:

"No, mother—not here, at all events. I must shake this off, if only for a few minutes, or I shall go out of my mind. I'll take a turn in the air; and if I feel faint or to want any thing, I'll go to the Club and get it. You go home and to bed, dearest; for you must be thoroughly knocked up with all my worries, which you are compelled to share; she won't come back to-night—it's all over now; and to-morrow we must face the future, and see what we're to do with the rest of our lives."

So they kissed again, and then went out together: Frank with a dead, dull, wearying pain at his heart; and his mother, sad enough to see him so sad, but with some little consolation mingled with her grief at the feeling that this event was not unlikely to bring her and her son more together again; to give her the chance of being in more frequent and more affectionate communication with that being whom she worshipped next to her Creator; of enjoying that to her inexpressible delight, of having her son "all to herself" again.

Leaving the old lady at the door of her lodgings, Frank strode on at a rapid pace, neither looking to the right nor to the left, seeing none of the people by whom he passed, thinking of nothing but his lost love. At length the long fasting he had undergone began to tell upon him, he felt sick and faint, and determined to go to his Club to get some refreshment,—not to the Flyby-nights; he could not have borne the noisy racket, the bewildering chaff, of that circle of free-lances; so he strode steadily down to Pall Mall, and turned into the Retrenchment. Even that solemn temple of gastronomy and politics was far too lively for him in his then mood. The coffee-room was filled with a number of men who had dined late, many of whom, just returned from their

autumnal expeditions, and not having met for a couple of months, had "joined tables," and were loudly talking over their holiday experiences. All was light and lively and jolly; and Frank felt, as he sat in the midst of them, like the death's-head at the banquet. At one table close by his four men were sitting over their wine, one of the number being rallied by the rest about his approaching marriage. "You're a lucky fellow, by Jove, Hope!" Frank heard one of them say; "I always said Miss Chudleigh was the prettiest girl out since the Lexden's year." "What's become of the Lexden—didn't she get married or something?" asked another. "Oh, yes!" answered the first—"married a man who's a member here. I don't know him; but a cleverish fellow, I believe. No tin—regular case of spoons, they said it was." "Mistake that!" said the *fiancé*, whose future father-in-law was a wealthy brewer; "spoons is all very well, but it wants something to back it." "Ah, but it's not every one that has your luck," said old Tommy Orme, who just then joined the party—"nor, I will say, Hope, it isn't every one that deserves it, by Jove!" and on the strength of that speech, old Tommy determined to borrow a ten-pound note from his friend on the first opportunity. Frank shuddered as he listened, and bent his head over his cutlet. "Was there any thing in what those men had said?" he asked himself, as he walked home. Could it have been that the state of comparative poverty into which he had brought his wife had soured her temper, rendered her jealous and querulous, and so disgusted her as to cause her to avail herself of the first excuse which presented itself for returning to her former life? It might be so, indeed. If it were, Frank was not disposed to think of her very uncharitably: he knew the whole wealth of love which he had bestowed upon her; but he thought that her bringing-up might perhaps have rendered her incapable of appreciating it; and he went to his solitary bed with a feeling of something more than pity for his absent wife, after imploring peace to and pardon for them both in his prayers.

The evening of the next day, however, found him in

a very different frame of mind. Not one word had been heard from Barbara; and the fact of her absence, and the manner of her departure, had been thoroughly well discussed throughout the neighbourhood. Early in the morning, Frank, with the conviction that all must eventually be known, had removed the seal from his mother's lips; and the old lady's circumstantial account, softened as much as her conscience would allow,—for she felt really more strongly than she had admitted about Barbara's defection,—was detailed to various knots of familiar friends throughout the day. The astonishment of the Mesopotamians was immense; immense their horror, deep the condemnation they poured upon the peccant one. The good women of the district could not realise what had occurred. If Barbara had eloped, they would have had some slight glimmering of it; though an elopement was a thing which in their idea only occurred in highly aristocratic families. They had heard through the medium of the newspapers, stories of postchaise followed by postchaise speeding along the northern road, guilty wife and "gay Lothario" (Mesopotamian phrase for cavalier villany varying from seduction to waltzing) in the one, injured husband in the other. But how a woman could take herself off, leave her home and her husband, and send a servant for her things afterwards, my dear, as cool as if she were going by the railway train,—that beat them altogether. But though they could not understand, they could condemn, and did, in most unmeasured terms. Whatever the motive might have been, and the most energetic among them could not find in what was said any thing particularly damnifying ("in what is said, my dear; but I'm sure there must be something behind all this that we don't know of, but which will come out some day"),—whatever the motive might have been, there was the fact; that could not be got rid of or explained away: Mrs. Frank Churchill had left her home and was not living with her husband. What more or less could you make of that? Some of them had seen it in her from the first.

There was something—one section said, in her eye, another in her manner—which showed discontent, or worse. “Something” in her walk which displeased many of them greatly—“as though the ground she trod upon was not good enough for her,” they said. And she who had held her head so high, for whom none of them were good enough, had come to this. Well, if being a fine lady and being brought up amongst great people led to *that*, thank goodness they were as they were.

Mrs. Harding had been one of the earliest to receive old Mrs. Churchill’s confidence, and had been so much astonished and impressed by what she heard, that she at once returned home and proceeded to rouse her husband, then peacefully sleeping off his hard night’s work. It must have been something quite out of the common to have prompted such a step, as George Harding was never pleased at having his hard-earned rest broken in upon; but on this occasion his wife thought she had a complete justification. So she went softly into the closed room, undrew the curtains and let in the full morning sun; then she shook the sleeper’s shoulder and called “George!” Harding roused himself at once and demanded what was the matter; he always had an idea, when suddenly awakened from sleep, that something had happened to the paper, either an Indian mail omitted, or a leader of the wrong politics inserted, or something equally dreadful in its result; and he had scarcely got his eyes fairly open, when his wife said, “Oh, my dear, such a terrible thing for poor Churchill!”

“What do you mean?” asked George, broad-awake in an instant; “nobody ill?”

“Oh, no, my dear; much better if it were. She’s gone, my dear!”

“Who’s gone; what on earth do you mean?” and then his wife told him the story circumstantially. And after hearing it George Harding dressed himself at once and went out to see his friend.

He found Churchill sitting in his little study, looking vacantly before him. There were no signs of work on

the desk, no book near him; he had evidently been sitting for some time in a state of semi-stupor. He was very pale; but he looked up at the opening of the door and smiled faintly when he saw who it was. There was something so cheery in dear old George Harding's presence, that it shed light wherever he went, no matter how dark the surroundings: men who, as they knelt by the coffins of their wives, had prayed to God to take them then and there,—men who, contemplating the ruin sweeping down upon them, had horribly suggestive thoughts of the laudanum-bottle or the pistol-barrel,—had felt the dark clouds pass away at the sound of his genial voice and the sight of his hopeful face. But there were tears in George Harding's gray eyes as he took his friend's hand, and his voice shook a little as he said, "My dear old Frank! my poor dear fellow!"

"I'm hard hit, Harding, and that's the truth. You've heard all about it, of course?" Frank asked nervously, fearing he might have again to recount the miserable history.

"Yes, my wife has told me,—she heard it from your mother, I believe,—and I came on at once. Do you know I'm horribly afraid, Frank, that it was from your taking my advice that this quarrel took place?"

"Your advice?"

"Yes, about tightening the curb. I told you, if you recollect, that I thought there should be a greater amount of firmness and decision in your manner to Mrs. Churchill, and—"

"Oh, you need not be anxious on that score; it must have come sooner or later; and it's come sooner, that's all!"

"And what are you going to do?"

"Do? what do sensible men do when they have troubles? Grin and bear them, don't they? And so shall I. I can't live alone; so I shall instal my mother here again, and, I suppose, all will—will be pretty much as it was eighteen months ago."

"I was afraid from what my wife said, that I should

find you in some such mood as this," said Harding sternly. "One would think you were mad, Frank Churchill, to hear you talk such stuff. Don't you know that Mrs. Churchill is as much your wife before God and man as she ever was? Don't you feel that she has done nothing for which even the wretched laws which we in our mighty wisdom have chosen to frame would justify you in treating her in this way? I can understand it all; you've been worked upon by the chatter and magging of these silly women until you've lost your own calm common-sense. But don't you feel now, Frank, that I'm right? Don't you feel that a fit of rage, a mere wretched passing temper, is not the thing to separate those whom—you know I use it in no canting sense—those whom God has joined together? Don't you feel that it is your duty to go to her, or to send—I'll go if you like, though it's not a very pleasant office—to point out to her the miserable folly of this course, and to bring her back to her proper place—her home?"

"My dear Harding," said Frank quietly, "I know you are sincere in your advice, but it is impossible for me to take it. My wife has subjected me to a very great outrage; and until that is explained and atoned for, I will never look upon or speak to her."

Harding would have said something more, but Churchill raised his hand in deprecation, and then changed the subject.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE PAPER BULLET.

LIKE the man and woman in the toy weather-house, Mr. Schröder's two houses never were "to the fore" at the same time. When the one was lighted, the other was gloomy; when the one was tenanted, the other was empty; when the one was decorated, the other was comfortless. As the second breath of summer came floating over Kensington Gardens, after the may- and apple-blossoms had disappeared, but long before dust and drouth had settled down on the greensward and the umbrageous walks of the parks; when there was evinced among young men a perpetual desire to dine at the Star-and-Garter at Richmond, and an undying hatred of passing the Sunday within the metropolis; when Mr. Quartermaine began to wonder where he should stow all his visitors, and Mr. Skindle of the Orkney Arms began to think of building; when fashionable people thought it no more harm to sit in their carriages outside Grange's, than to call diamonds 'dimonds,' or ribbon 'ribbin;' when the Sunday-afternoon attendance at the Zoological Gardens began to exceed the week-day; when green-peas began to have some taste, and asparagus to be something else beside stalk and stick,—then the glory of the Saxe-Coburg-Square establishment showed strong symptoms of waning. The usual amount of solemn dinner-party had been gone through; every body necessary had been asked to balls, music, and *conversazioni*; Mrs. Schröder's taste and Mr. Schröder's wealth had been exhibited constantly at the Opera and at some of the most fashionable gatherings in London; and one, if not both, of them longed for a little

quiet. This resulted in the renting of Uplands, when blank misery fell upon the establishment in Saxe-Coburg Square. All the ornaments and nicknacks were removed and put away; the chandeliers were shrouded in big holland bags; the shutters were put up; and the spurious Schröder ancestors scowled dimly from the wall over a great desert of dining-table, no longer shining with snowy damask or sparkling silver and glass. The staff of servants,—the French cook and the Italian confectioner; the ponderous butler, so frequently mistaken by Mrs. Schröder's West-end friends for a City magnate; the solemn footman, large-whiskered, large-calved, ambrosial, and most offensive; the lady's-maid and the buttons,—all, down to the kitchen-maid, who lived in a perpetual state of grease and dripping, and who was preparing herself for "plain cook, good," in the *Times* column of 'Want Places,'—all went away into what the said kitchen-maid was heard to designate "that rubbishing country;" and an old woman, weird, puffy, dusty, with old black silk stitched about her head where her hair should have been, and with bits of beard sticking on her chin, came and took up her abode in the housekeeper's room and "kep' ouse" herself.

But when October was well set in, and the days grew short, and the showers not unfrequent; when, even if there were no showers, the heavy mists of morn and dews of night left the ground moist and dank and plappy; when weird night-winds rose and sighed Banshee-like over the hushed fields; when the lawn lost its soft verdure and grew brown and corrugated; when the trees, which during the summer had so picturesquely fringed the lawn and framed the distance, now gaunt and dismal, swayed mournfully to and fro, drearily rattling their stripped limbs,—then a general inclination to return back to the comfort of London began to be manifested by all the inhabitants of Uplands. It was all very pleasant when Mr. Schröder had spun his chestnuts up the leafy lanes, or over the breezy hills, in the summer; but it was a very different thing when he had to come the

same road from town in a close carriage, with the rain pattering against the windows, and with no gas for the last three miles of the journey. It was dull work for Mrs. Schröder and whatever female companion she might happen to have, with nothing to do but yawn over novels, or listlessly thrum the piano, or watch the gardeners filling their high barrows with dead leaves, and unceasingly sweeping the lawns and paths. She could have relieved her tedium by a little shopping, she thought; but there were no shops—at least what she called shops—within miles of Uplands. As to the servants, they all hated the place; there were no military for the females, and the policemen were all mounted patrols, who “just looked round at night on ’orseback, and never had no time for a gossip, or a bit of supper, or anythink friendly;” while the male domestics were removed from their clubs and all the other delights which a town-life afforded. So, to the great joy of all, the word was given to march; and the whole establishment descended on Saxe-Coburg Square, leaving Uplands to the care of the Scotch gardener, who removed his wife and family up from one of the lodges, and encamped in the kitchen and adjacent rooms.

Mrs. Schröder was by no means ill-pleased at the return to town. The moving gave her no trouble; she had merely to walk into her rooms and find every thing arranged for her; and she was in hopes that a salutary change would be effected in at least one arrangement which was beginning to worry her. The truth is, that during the last week of their stay at Uplands it had begun to dawn upon Mrs. Schröder that Charles Beresford’s attentions were not what they should be. She had more than once endeavoured to think out the subject; but her intellects were none of the brightest, and she got frightened, and either began to cry, or let every thing go by the board in the grand certainty that “it would be all right in the end.” But of late she had felt the necessity of taking some steps to bring the acquaintance between her and her admirer to some proper footing. This had not come on her entirely of her own accord.

She had noticed that her husband (whose attentions to her increased day by day from the time when his heart seemed to soften so suddenly and so strangely towards her) seemed to regard the presence of the Commissioner with obvious impatience. Mr. Schröder never, indeed, said any thing to his wife on the subject; but he evidently chafed when Beresford was in the house: and if Mrs. Schröder and Beresford were at all thrown together apart from the general company, they were sure to see Mr. Schröder's eyes fixed upon them. Others of her friends had not been so reticent. Captain Lyster had hinted once or twice, what Barbara Churchill had several times roundly spoken out—that Beresford was a *vaurien*, whose attentions were compromising to any married woman; and that if he had the smallest spark of gentlemanly feeling in him, he would desist from paying them. So Mrs. Schröder, who was nothing but a very silly weak little woman (there are few women who are really bad, even among those who have erred: the Messalinas and the Lady Macbeths are very exceptional cases), and who really had a sincere affection for her husband, had made up her mind that she was behaving badly, and had determined to break gradually, but uncompromisingly, with Mr. Beresford and his attentions. She had been so completely hoodwinked by the fraternal relations which, at Mr. Simnel's suggestion, the Commissioner had cultivated, that it was not until immediately previous to their quitting Uplands that she saw the danger she had been running, and felt horribly incensed with Mr. Beresford for his part in the affair.

They had been back for some days in Saxe-Coburg Square, and Alice Schröder was nestling in her easy-chair after luncheon, wondering when the opportunity would occur in which she could plainly point out to Mr. Beresford that he must altogether alter his conduct for the future, when Mrs. Churchill was announced, and Barbara entered the room.

She was very pale, walked very erect, and held out her two hands to Alice as she advanced.

"Why, Barbara! Barbara darling!" said impulsive little Alice, "I'm so delighted to—why, what's the matter, dear? how strange and odd you look!"

"I want you to have me here for a few days, Alice, if you will."

"Why, of course, dear! I'm so glad you've come at last; it wasn't for the want of asking, you know. And Mr. Churchill will be here to dinner, dear, at seven, eh?"

"Mr. Churchill will not come at all, Alice," said Barbara very gravely. "I am here alone."

"But he knows you've come here, doesn't he?"

"You don't understand me yet, Alice. I have left my husband."

"Left your husband! oh, Barbara, how dreadful! how could you!" and Alice Schröder's face exhibited such signs of unmistakable terror, that for the first time the magnitude of the step she had taken, and the apparent impossibility of its recall, seemed to flash upon Barbara. A rush of tears blinded her eyes; and she held out her hands appealingly, as she said, "You—you don't shrink from me, Alice?"

Astonishment, nothing more, had caused Mrs. Schröder's trepidation; in an instant she had rushed forward and wound her arms round Barbara's neck, saying, "Shrink from you, my darling? why, what madness to suppose such a thing! Where should you come but to my house, in such a case? Besides, it's nothing, darling, I suspect, but a temporary little foolish quarrel. Mr. Churchill will be here to dinner, and take you home with him afterwards."

But Barbara shook her head and burst into tears, saying that it was a matter which admitted of no compromise and no amicable settlement. And then, between floods of crying, she told Alice the outline of the quarrel; dwelling specially upon Frank's refusal to give up the letter he had received, or to say who was his correspondent. Alice seemed deeply impressed with the atrocity of Frank's conduct, though she doubted whether she

herself would have had the courage to take such a decided step as leaving her home ("You always said I was wanting in spirit, Barbara; and indeed I should not have known where to go to"). She recollected Barbara's having been upset at a letter which had come to Frank at Bissett, before they were engaged; and she was full of "O my's!" and general wonderment, as to who could have written both these mysterious epistles.

"Very odd," she said—"very odd, and very unpleasant. You're sure it was a woman's hand, dear? People do make such mistakes about that sometimes. Most dreadful, indeed! Well, that's one blessing, I've often thought, with Gustav, and is some compensation for his grayness and his being so much older, and that sort of thing. For grayness is better than jealousy, isn't it, dear? and I'm sure it's pleasanter to think of your husband at whist than waltzing, as some of them do—whirling about the room as though there were no such thing as the marriage service! And letters too, that's awful! I'm so glad you came here, Barbara darling; and so will Gustav be, when he comes in. We must tell him all about it. I tell him every thing now, he is *so* kind."

He was *very* kind, this heavy-headed elderly German merchant. When he came in, his wife at once told him what had occurred; and when he met Barbara in the drawing-room, before dinner, he took her hands in both of his, and pressed his lips gravely on her forehead, and bade her welcome, and told her to consider his house as her home. For Mr. Schröder had, in his strange old-fashioned way, a very keen sense of honour and of the respect due to women; and he felt, from the story that had been told to him, that Barbara's feelings had to a certain extent been outraged. He had never held much good opinion of the literary craft: he could not understand a calling which did not employ clerks and keep ledgers and day-books, which did not minister to any absolute requirement, and which only represented something visionary and fanciful. He shared in a very widespread notion that the *morale* of people engaged in that

and similar pursuits was specially liable to deterioration; and he took what he understood to be Frank Churchill's defection from the paths of propriety as an indorsement of his idea, and a proof that he had been right in its adoption. He happened to let fall some remark to this effect, a few words only, and not strongly or savagely put, but they had immense weight with Barbara Churchill.

For they immediately recalled to her recollection her several interviews with her aunt, Miss Lexden, when she first announced the engagement with Frank, and she remembered the acrimony with which the old lady had spoken of the class to which her intended husband belonged. The very words her aunt had used were ringing in her ears. "If I were to see you with broken health, with broken spirits, ill-used, deserted—as is likely enough, for I know these people,—I would not lift one finger to help you after your degradation of me!" "For I know these people!" Too well she knew them, it appears, when she predicated what had actually occurred. Not deserted, though; that at least could never be cast in her teeth. It was she who had taken the initiative;—she who had broken the bonds and—what could the world say to that? Would it not denounce her conduct as strange, unwomanly, and unwifelike? And if it did, what did she care? Her pride, her spirit, had often been spoken of; and she felt in no way ashamed of having permitted herself to be swayed by them in this great trial of her life. There must be many who would thoroughly understand her conduct, and sympathise with her; and even if there were none, she had the courage and the determination to stand alone. That she must to a great extent have right on her side—that what she had done could not be looked upon as extravagant or unjustifiable—was proved, she argued to herself, by the kind reception she had met with at the hands of Mr. Schröder, a man who, as she judged from all she had heard and seen of him, would not be likely lightly to pass over any breach of decorum. How or where the

rest of her life was to be passed engrossed very little of her attention at first. She knew that there was no chance of reconciliation with her aunt; nor did she wish it. She had quarrelled with her husband, certainly, and would never be induced to live with him again; but her cheek flushed when she remembered what insults had been heaped upon Frank by her aunt; and she thought almost tenderly of him as she decided that after these insults nothing would induce her to humiliate herself to Miss Lexden's caprices. The thought of writing to Sir Marmaduke Wentworth crossed her mind; but Alice Schröder had told her that Sir Marmaduke was laid up with a dangerous illness in the Pyrenees; it would be very inopportune to worry him, then, with domestic dissensions; and moreover Barbara was in very great doubt as to whether the old gentleman, were he able, would not take an active part in promoting a peace, and whether he would not strongly disapprove of, and openly condemn, the course she had taken. He had a very high opinion of Frank Churchill, who was his godson; and unless it could be distinctly proved that he had committed himself—unless it could be distinctly proved—could it? what proof was there? had not her pride and spirit involved her in a snare? how could she make her case good before an unbiassed judge? There was the letter, and the letter in the same handwriting which he had received at Bissett; but she had no actual proofs that they were not such as should have been sent to any properly-conducted man. Great Heaven, if she had been too precipitate! if she had brought about an *exposé* by rashness and wretched jealousy; if she had wrongly suspected that kind and generous soul, and cruelly stabbed him without hearing his defence! As Barbara turned these matters in her mind, sitting in her bedroom on the first night of her arrival in Saze-Coburg Square, she felt the whole current of her being setting towards Frank; and she covered with her tears and kisses his miniature which hung in a locket at her watch-chain. Must this be the end of it? could her fatal folly—if folly it were

—darken the rest of her life? Oh, no! she could never acknowledge her error,—that would be impossible; her pride would never permit her to take the first steps towards a reconciliation: but Frank would come—she knew it; he would come and ask her to return; and she would go; and the rest of their life should be unclouded happiness.

But Frank did not come; and the next morning when Barbara found the hours wearing very slowly by, and no solution of her wretchedness arrived at; when little Alice Schröder's well-meant chatter—well-meant, intended to be consolatory, but still chatter after all—had utterly failed in giving the smallest consolation; when Captain Lyster had called, and having been properly prepared by Mrs. Schröder before he saw Barbara, had evidently the greatest difficulty in assuming ignorance and unconcern; when the day had worn on, and no progress had been made by her in any one way,—the bitter spirit rose in her more strongly than ever, and she felt more and more impressed as to the righteousness of her cause. The fact that Frank had not come to her, crying "peccavi," and imploring her to return, had, to a very great extent, convinced her that he must have been grievously in the wrong. Fully prepared not merely to forgive him what he had not done, but to be generous enough to meet him half way in an advance which ought to have been made by her alone, she was annoyed beyond description at his making no sign; and each hour that passed over her head strengthened her obstinacy and deepened her misery.

So several days went by. Barbara resolutely refused to go out; nothing could induce her to be seen in public, and none were admitted to the house save the intimate male friends of the family. Barbara stipulated, at once, that no women should be let in, and Alice, who believed in the most marvellous degree in Barbara, agreed to it. She did, indeed, suggest one female name, the name of a lady in whom she was sure, she said, Barbara would find great comfort; but Barbara, who had some acquaintance

with the person in question, hissed out, "Cat!" with such ferocity, that little Alice never dared again to open the question. The men-friends were restricted to two or three, among whom Barbara was glad, for Alice's sake, to find Captain Lyster, and equally glad not to find Mr. Beresford. She remembered Lyster's confidence to her at Uplands (she had reason to remember it, she thought with bitterness), and that confidence, though accidentally distressing to herself, had impressed her with a high notion of the Captain's truth and honour. She felt as though she would have liked to have talked to him about her own troubles; but she did not know how to start the subject, and Lyster never gave her the smallest chance.

On the fourth day after Barbara's arrival, Mrs. Schröder asked her guest, as usual, if she would drive out after luncheon, and having received the usual negative, declared that she could not stand it any longer, but that air she must have. Barbara would excuse her? Of course Barbara would; nothing she liked so much as being left alone. Then Mrs. Schröder determined on riding, and ordered her horse and groom round to the door, and went out for a ride.

She thought she would go for a stretch round the suburban lanes; it was better and more fitted for an unaccompanied lady than the Park. So turning in at Queen's Gate, she skirted the Row, and riding over the Serpentine bridge turned up towards Westbourne Terrace, at the end of which, leisurely riding along, she saw Mr. Beresford. He saw her too, and in an instant was at her side; sitting his horse to perfection, and bowing with perfect ease and grace. He asked her where she was riding, and begged to be allowed to accompany her. She had a refusal on the tip of her tongue; then recollected that she might never have another chance of speaking to him as frankly and decidedly as she had made up her mind to speak. So she consented. During the ride, she spoke earnestly and well; Beresford tried sophistry and special pleading; but they had little chance with her, so thoroughly in earnest was she. It was

while in the height of his argument that they passed the lodge-gates of The Den, and were seen by Kate Mellon.

Mrs. Schröder rode home that evening in a happier frame of mind than she had been in for months. She felt that she had effectually settled all Mr. Beresford's pretensions, and that she might meet her husband without the smallest shadow on her brow. Her joy was a little dashed by the receipt of a letter from her husband, which was put into her hand as she alighted from her horse. It said that an Egyptian prince, with whom the house had large transactions, had arrived at Southampton, and that he, Gustav, as representing the house, was compelled to go down and do the honours to him ; that he had telegraphed to his brother to relieve him as soon as possible ; and that he hoped to be back the next day.

Mrs. Schröder's hopes were realised. In the course of the next afternoon a cab drove up to the door in Saxe-Coburg Square, and Mr. Schröder descended from it. His wife, who had rushed to the balcony at the sound of wheels, noticed that his step was slow, and that—a thing she had never seen him do before—he leant upon the cabman's arm. When he entered the room she rushed to him, and, embracing him, asked him how he was.

"I am well, my darling," he answered ; "quite well, but that I have rheumatism, or something like it. A curious pain—dead, dull, stupid pain—in my left arm and shoulder. Rheumatism, of course ! And you, Barbara, my dear ; you are well ? That's right ; no news with you, of course ? Ah ! I have been thinking much about you in the train, and we will talk to-morrow of your affairs. Well, Alice, what news ? Did you persuade Barbara to drive yesterday?"

"No, she refused again ; so I went out on horseback."

"Ah, ah ! that was right. Alone ?"

"I went alone ; but I met Mr. Beresford."

"Beresford ! I hate that name ; he is a bad man. Bad ! bad !"

And Mr. Schröder shook his hand in the air, and was obviously very much excited.

"Gustav," said Mrs. Schröder, "I'm very sorry that—"

"Ah, you don't know! More of this Beresford another time. A bad man, my dear! Now I must look through my letters. Dinner at seven, eh?"

And with a bow, Mr. Schröder descended to his library.

The clock had struck seven, the gong had boomed through the house, and Alice and Barbara were standing at the dining-table; the place at the head being vacant.

"You had better tell your master, Pilkington," said Mrs. Schröder to the great butler; "he is probably in his dressing-room."

The great butler condescended to inform his mistress that he did not think his master had left the library.

Mrs. Schröder then bade him find his master, and tell him they were waiting dinner.

The butler left the room, and the next moment came running back, with a face whiter than his own neckcloth. Barbara saw him ere he had crossed the threshold; in an instant she saw that something had happened; and motioning the butler to precede her, walked to the library, followed by Mrs. Schröder.

Fallen prone on his face, across the library-table, lay Mr. Schröder, dead, with an open letter rustling between his stiffening fingers.

CHAPTER XXXII.

HALF-REVEALED.

As Kate Mellon had soliloquised, some time had elapsed since Mr. Simnel had visited The Den. A wary general, Mr. Simnel ; a man who, like the elephant, never put his foot forward without first carefully feeling the ground in front of him, and trying whether it would bear ; a man who, above all, never was in a hurry. He had not gone through life cautiously and with his eyes wide open without remarking how frequently a little impulse, a little over excitement or yielding to headstrong urging, had led to direful results.

“No hurry” was one of his choicest maxims : to sleep upon an idea ; to let information just received mellow in his mind until he saw the very best way to utilise it ; to brood over the most promising projects, carefully sifting the chaff from the grain ; to wait patiently until the two or three shadowy alternatives had, after due inspection, resolved themselves into one broad path, impossible to be shrunk from—that was Mr. Simnel’s way of doing business. He never allowed the iron to be overheated. So soon as it was malleable, he struck—struck with irresistible force and sure aim ; but he never dallied with the half-heated metal, or tried warpings with pincers, or blind struggles with solid resistance. If he had a fault in his worldly dealings, it was that he delighted in hiding the power which he was able to wield, even beyond the legitimate time for its manifestation. There are men, you will have observed, who, in playing whist and other games of chance and skill,—long-headed calculators, far-seers, sticklers for every point of Hoyle,—yet

cannot resist the temptation of withholding their ace until the best time for its production is long past, solely for the sake of causing a sensation, for the sake of creating a feeling of astonishment among their fellow players that the great card has been all that time in hand. So it was, to a certain extent, with Robert Simmel.

He had known nothing of love, this man, during his youth. He had had no time for the cultivation of any tender passion. He had been brought up roughly, with his own way to make, with his own living to get. He was not pretty to look at, and no ladies felt an interest in smoothing his hair or patting his cheeks. The matron at the Combeardingham grammar-school,—a sour blighted old maid, a poor sad old creature, who yet retained some reminiscences of hope in her forlorn frame; in whom head-washing and looking after linen had not obliterated all traces of feminine weakness, and who remembered early days, when she dreamed that some day some one might make her some kind of a marriage offer, dreams which had never been fulfilled,—this weird sister had her favourites among the boys; but Simmel was not of them. They were mostly fat-headed, sleek-faced boys, apple, rubicund, red-lipped, and shiny; boys with reminiscences of home, who kissed Miss Wardroper as a kind of bad substitute for Ma, and who traded on their blowing beauty to be let off easily on tub-night, and to have advances of pocket money before the regular day. Robert Simmel had no share in these pettings; he was what Miss Wardroper considered an “uncomfortable lad;” he was “nothing to look at;” and preferred lying on his stomach under trees with a book between his elbows, on which his face was resting, or sitting bolt upright, trying to catch on his page the glimmer from the school-fire, to all the cosettings of the housekeeper’s room. In immediate after-life his course of conduct was pretty much the same. Combeardingham was not a moral town. Many of the pretty girls who worked hard all day dressed in great finery in the evenings, and proceeded to

the theatre, to the gardens, to the *al-fresco* entertainments with which the suburbs of the town were studded, attended by the youth of the place. The conveyancing-clerk of Messrs. Banner and Blair, the common-law ditto, and the Chancery manager, were accustomed to speak of Annie, and Emmy, and Fanny, as though the establishment of those eminent lawyers had been the Hotel-Dieu, and they the interlocutors had been Parisian students instead of provincial lawyers; the very copying-clerk, who served writs, and fetched beer for the gentlemen in the inner office, had been seen to wink his eye, and heard to mention some such article as "a bit of muslin." But Robert Simnel had remained adamant. They dared not chaff him; there was something in his manner which forbade any approach to familiarity. Some of the ribalds had once set some of their female friends to get a rise out of the quiet studious shame-faced young man; but the girls had been met with perfect politeness, mixed with such studied coldness, that the game was given up in despair. From that time until he came up to London, Simnel was left unworried.

His life in town was equally cold and celibate. He moved very little in the female society of his own class; not that he was unwelcome, but that he disliked it. It bored him; and that was the worst thing that could happen to him when once his foot was fairly set on the ladder. In the old days he had endured men, women, parties, society,—all utterly repugnant to his feelings and tastes; and he had vowed that, should he ever have the power, the severance of such obligatory ties would be the first luxury in which he would indulge; and he kept his word. "My lady," would chirp little Sir Hickory Maddox,—“my lady has bid me bring you this note of invitation to dine with us next Wednesday, Simnel. Formal, you perceive; for you are such a well-known stickler for formalities, that we fain must treat you à la Grandison;” and then Sir Hickory, who prided himself on the construction of his sentences, would double up his little head into his ample cravat, and bow in a mock heroic manner,

But Mr. Simmel managed to find an excuse for not attending the solemn dinners of his chief; nor did he ever attend the pleasant *réunions* of Mrs. Gillotson and Mrs. Franks, wives of the senior officers of his department, to which he was bidden. Of course, as a bachelor, it was not supposed that he should receive lady visitors; and though his rooms in Piccadilly had witnessed certain scenes which their proprietor described as *petits soupers*, but which the mother-in-law of the serious saddler who held the shop below openly proclaimed as "orgies," at which certain distinguished *coryphées* of Her Majesty's Theatre were present, and there was lots of fun and laughter and champagne, and an impromptu galop after supper,—no one could tax Simmel with any decided flirtation. He had been very polite to, more than that, very jolly with every body, thoroughly hospitable, genial, and kind; but when they broke up, and Punter Blair put Fanny Douglas into a cab, and Sis Considine walked away with Kate Trafford and her sister Nelly, and the whole party turned out laughing and singing into the street, Robert Simmel went round the rooms and put out the wax-lights, and picked up bits of lobster-shell and cracker-paper from the floor, and yawned confoundedly, and was deuced glad it was over.

So he went on his way through life, with that way unilluminated by one spark of love until he first saw Kate Mellon. How well he recollected every circumstance connected with the first glimpse of her! It was on a glorious spring afternoon at the beginning of the season; he was walking with Beresford (with whom he was just beginning to be intimate) through the Row, when he noticed the heads of the promenaders all turned one way; and following the direction, he saw a mounted female figure coming at a rapid pace down the ride. The horse she sat was a splendid black barb, an impetuous tearing fellow, who had not yet learned that he was not to have his own way in life, and who was making the most desperate struggle to recover such submission as he had been compelled to yield. In and out, in and out, from side to

side, he bounded, obedient to the light hand, the scarcely tapping whip and the swerving body of his rider; but his foam-flecked chest and his sweat-rippled neck showed how unwillingly he accepted his lesson. At length, on catching sight of Beresford, who left Simnel's arm and walked to the rails, Kate drew rein, and, while she gave one hand to her acquaintance, she relaxed the other until the horse had full play for his stretching neck. Simnel stood amazed at her beauty and at the perfect outline of her supple figure. She was just exactly his style. Mr. Simnel had no admiration for Grecian features or classic mould. Ebon tresses and deep dreamy eyes were little regarded by him; his taste was of the earth, earthy; piquancy of expression, plumpness of form, was what he, to use his own expression, "went in for." He would not have bestowed a second glance upon Barbara Churchill; but Kate Mellon was exactly to his taste. He filled his eyes and his heart with her as she sat talking to Beresford that day; the sweeping lines of her habit, the dainty little handkerchief peeping out of the saddle-pocket, the dogskin gauntlets, the neat chimney-pot hat, the braided hair, the face flushed with exercise,—all these lived vividly in his remembrance, and came in between his eyes and letters for signature to irascible correspondents and long accounts of indebted tax-payers. He was not long in obtaining an introduction to his idol; and then he saw at once, with his innate sharpness, that he had but little chance of pressing his suit. Long before that *éclaircissement* which Beresford had described to him, Simnel saw the state of affairs in that direction, and knew what Kate Mellon fondly hoped could never be realised. He did not think that the girl ever would have the chance of so plainly stating the position of affairs; but he knew Beresford well enough to be certain that moral cowardice would prevent his availing himself of the position offered to him. Nor did Simnel blame him in this; that farseeing gentleman knew perfectly that for any man in society to ally himself in matrimony to a woman with a reputation which was equivocal simply from her profession, no

matter how excellent the individual herself might be, was sheer madness. "It isn't," he argued to himself, "as though I were a landed proprietor or a titled swell, who could throw the ægis of my rank and position over her, and settle the question. Heaps of them have done that; dukes have married actresses of queer names and women of no name at all, and all the past life has been elegantly festooned over with strawberry-leaves. I'm a self-made man, and they hate me for that, though my status is now such that they can't deny it; but then they'd immediately begin to ask questions about my wife; and if there were a chance of flooring us there, we should be done entirely."

So when Mr. Beresford had told the story of his adventure with Kate Mellon, Mr. Simnel, who had very much slacked off the scent, purely from want of encouragement and a chance of seeing his way, returned to the charge with renewed vigour. Beresford had faithfully repeated to his Mentor every word of Kate's wild outburst; and in that sudden revelation Simnel, nothing amazed thereby, had found a strong incentive to further exertion. Kate had hinted at relatives of whom her future husband need not be ashamed. Who were they? That was one of the first points to be found out. He wisely looked upon Charles Beresford as now cleared out of his way. It was not for nothing that Mr. Simnel had read at the Combeardingham grammar-school of the *spretæ injuria formæ*; and he knew that the Commissioner had probably committed himself for ever in the eyes of the lady of The Den. Nevertheless, to make assurance doubly sure, he at once used all his influence towards turning Beresford's views in another direction; thus further irritating Kate's pride, and preventing any chance of a reconciliation; for this apparently phlegmatic man of business, this calm, calculating, long-headed dry chip of an official, loved the little woman with his whole heart and strength, and determined to miss no opportunity of so winning her regard by his devotion to her cause, and by the tangible results springing therefrom. That must tell

in the end, he thought. She is now heart-sore about Beresford; she has discovered the foundation of sand on which her first little castle was built; and now she will not touch the ruins or lay another stone. There is but one way to arouse in her any new life,—the keynote to be touched is ambition. If there be any truth in her assertion that she is sprung from a race of which she can be proud, one may work it through that. So Mr. Simmel worked away. He speedily found that Kate's own knowledge of her origin was cloudy in the extreme; but he possessed, in a rare degree, the faculty of putting two and two together and making four of them very rapidly; and he had not been very long chewing the cud of poor Kitty's stories of the circus, and the uncle, and all the rest of it, before he saw a clue which sent him spinning far into Northumberland by express-train to a place where he saw the circus which Kate had named was advertised in those wonderful columns of the *Era* as then performing.

No one accompanied Mr. Simmel on that journey; no one knew what he did or what he heard; but as the chronicler of these mild adventures, I may state that though not in the least astonished at what was—after a free pecuniary disbursement—imparted to him, he came back to London radiant. The clerks in the Tin-Tax Office did not know what to make of him; some of the young ones thought he had got married; but at that suggestion the older men shook their heads. That was the last thing, they opined, to cause an access of animal spirits. He might have come in for a legacy, or taken the change out of some body whom he hated; that was all they could see to account for his cheerfulness. Two or three of the men, Mr. Pringle of course among the number, improved the occasion by asking for a day or two's leave of absence; a request at once granted by the smiling secretary, who, on the day after his return, announced his intention of making a half-holiday, and wound his way towards The Den. He rode through the lodge-gate, and exchanged salutations with the rosy portress; but as he turned into the carriage-drive he

perceived Freeman, the old stud-groom, standing at the entrance to the stables, alert and expectant. As soon as the old man recognised Simnel, he advanced towards him, and motioned him towards the farmyard. Simnel turned his horse's head in that direction, and when he arrived inside the gates and on the straw-ride, old Freeman held his bridle as he dismounted.

"A word wi' you, sir," said the old man, putting his finger on his lip and nodding mysteriously.

Mr. Simnel looked astonished, but said nothing, as the old groom called to a helper, to whose care he relinquished the horse; then taking Simnel into a little room and planting him in the midst of a grove of girths and stirrups, the saddles of which formed an alcove above him, the old man produced a short set of steps, and motioning to Simnel to seat himself on the top of them, took up his position immediately in front of him, and said, in a voice intended to be low, but in reality very hissing sonorous,—

"Waät be matther?"

It was seldom that Mr. Simnel was nonplussed, but this was beyond him. He had only caught one word, and that he thought better to repeat. So he merely ejaculated "matter?"

"Ay, matther!" echoed the old man, this time in rather an angry tone. "Waät be matther down yon?" jerking his head towards the house. Mr. Simnel thought that the man was presuming on his position to take liberties, a very terrible crime in his eyes, so he simply elevated his thick eyebrows and echoed, "Down yon?"

"Thou knowst waät a mean, sir, weel enow. Waät be matther wi' my leddy? waät be matther wi' my bright lassie ai've tended this ever so long?" and the old man's face puckered up into wrinkles, and he produced from his hat a cotton handkerchief, with which he rubbed his eyes.

"What do you mean, Freeman? I didn't follow you until this instant. Is—is your mistress ill?" asked Simnel.

"No, not ill; that's to say wait folk call ill; always greetin', that wait she is,—thinkin' of something yon,—givin' no heed to wait goes on close to her face. Eyes lookin' far away out into the distance; no thowt of the stock such as she had: hasn't been into the farrier's shop these three weeks,—blister here, singe there, do as 't loikes; Miss never says nay now, and that's bad sign; for a more thrifty body never stepped."

"Ah, she doesn't take such interest, you mean, in what goes on here as she did."

"Int'rest! She cares nowt about it!" said the old man. "Ther' soommut oop, soommut wrang! that's what ther' is. Ther' can't have been no one a philanderin' wi' her, on and off like,—you understand?"

"I should think not," said Mr. Simmel, with a face as solid as a rock.

"If I'd thowt that," said old Freeman, "and I'd found 'em out, I'd beat 'ems brains out as if it were a stoat!" and as he spoke he struck the palm of his hand with the handle of his hunting-whip in an unmistakably vicious manner. "Dunno wait's coom to her to-day," he continued, after a pause; "haven't set eyes on her all the morning. Hasn't been in t'yard, hasn't been in t'stairles, hasn't moved out of t'house."

This latter part of Freeman's speech seemed to arouse Mr. Simmel's fading attention; he looked up sharply, and said,

"Not been out of the house all the morning! what does that mean? Who was here yesterday?"

"Yesterday," said the old man slowly considering; "there were Sanderack coom oop about Telegram's navicular,—no more navicular than I am; nowt but a sprain;—and Wallis from Wethers's wi' a pair o' job grays; and old Mr. Isaacson as tried some pheayton 'osses; and—"

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Simmel; "no young man; no one in the habit of coming here?"

"Not one," said Freeman.

"That's devilish odd," said Mr. Simmel, half to himself; "what the deuce has happened to upset her? I'll

go in and see. Good-day, Freeman; I've brought some good news for your mistress, and I hope we shall soon see her herself again."

The old man touched his hat, as Simmel walked off to the house, where he found Kate's servant, and learnt from her that her mistress had kept her room all the morning, complaining of headache. From this domestic Mr. Simmel had a repetition of old Freeman's story. Not only had she seemingly lost all interest in her business, which formerly so thoroughly engrossed her attention, but for the last few months she had been in every respect a thoroughly changed woman.

"I've been with her four year," said the woman, holding her hands clasped in front of her, and beating time with them at the conclusion of each sentence; "four year I've been with her, and never see no megrims. A cheerfuller lighter-hearted lady there were not, so long as you was quick. Every thing must be done directly minute, and all was right. But latterly there's been nothink but megrims and lowness of sperrits, and no caring for what we wears or what we eats, or whether we eats at all, indeed." This and much more to the same effect, only cut short by Simmel's requesting the woman to take his name to her mistress, and say he was anxious for a few words with her.

He sat down in the dining-room and took up a *Bell's Life* which lay on the table; but had hardly glanced at it when the door was hurriedly thrown open and Kate entered. She was perfectly colourless and trembled violently. As she gave her cold hand to Simmel, she asked at once,

"What's the matter. Simmel? what's brought you here? Something particular to say, they tell me. What is it?"

Though Mr. Simmel was in reality very much shocked at the change which had taken place in her personal appearance, he did not betray it by look or word. There was not a break in his voice as, retaining her hand between his, he said,

"Why, Kate, is this your hospitality? is this the way you receive visitors, demanding their business in this pistol-to-the-head fashion? Suppose I were to say that my pressing business was to look at and to talk to you."

"No, no, Simnel; no nonsense. At least not now, please; as much as you like when you've answered me. There hasn't been a—I mean he hasn't—you haven't—confound it, Simnel, why don't you help me?" and she stamped her foot upon the floor in rage.

"Kate, Kate," said he, still quietly, though this little evidence of her excited state touched him very deeply, "I can't tell what is the matter with you to-day. I've come to talk to you and to tell you a little news about yourself—that's all."

"About myself? not about—I mean about no one else? Nothing has happened? nothing—"

"Nothing that I know of. I only arrived in town late last night, and I have seen no one this morning. What on earth did you expect? Now you're flushing again! My dear Kate, you're not well, child; you must—"

"I'm all right now," said she, withdrawing her hand; "I'm all right again. It was only some stupid nonsense; I'm a bit nervous, I think. I'll have some change of air, and see what that will do. I'm as nervous as a cat. Had a girl here for a lesson yesterday. Fine girl, sister of Dick Hamilton's—Dirty Dick's, you know; and she wanted to see me put her horse at the brook. The brute refused, and I couldn't put him at it the second time—lost my pluck—funked it myself—fancy that! First time such a thing ever happened to me!"

"You want change and rest, Kitty," said Simnel, kindly. "And you want rest of mind much more than mere respite from bodily fatigue. Your life lately has been past in a series of storms, in which you have been tossed about, and whirled here and there, in a manner which is now beginning to tell upon you. Now, all these starts and flushes and tremors to-day are the result of some fresh worry. What happened yesterday?"

"Happened yesterday?" echoed Kate, flushing deeply as she spoke; "nothing."

"Who was here?" asked Simnel, in a mild tone of voice, but fixing his eyes full on her.

"Here? who? How dare you question me in this way? Who are you to come worming and prying into my affairs? I never asked you to come, and I sha'n't be sorry how soon you go!"

He was not an atom moved at this outburst of rage, at these taunts; at least he did not appear so. He only shook his head, and said sorrowfully,

"Unfair, Kitty; horribly unfair. I've just come back from a journey of hundreds of miles, undertaken for the object of what you are pleased to term 'worming and prying into your affairs;' and this is all the thanks I get."

She seized his hand, and pressed it warmly. "There, there! forget it: it's all part and parcel of my nervousness, that I was telling you about. Now you shall know who was here yesterday. Beyond the usual business-people, only one man—Scadgers the money-lender!"

"Scadgers! The deuce he was! What brought him? Did he come to—no, that's impossible. What did bring him?"

"Now it's you that are muttering to yourself, Simnel," said Kate. "Make your mind easy; a letter from me brought him here. I wanted a little assistance."

"Stuff, Kitty! What on earth—oh, I see now. You little flat! you've been paying young Prescott's bills for him."

"Well, what if I have? You don't mind."

"Mind! not I. I love you better for it. Oh, I see you smile; but I've been making a few inquiries at the Office since I was here last, and I find that it is a case with your pupil and him. He's a fine young fellow, and will do well." It is astonishing how, when we are no longer jealous of a man, his good qualities crop out.

"He *is* a good fellow; a thoroughly good fellow; a gentleman in every thought," said Kate; "and it was

only right to give him a clean start again. All young men—all who are worth any thing—kick up their heels at first; and then some fools pull them in tight, and they get sulky and vicious, and never run straight afterwards. But if they're held straight in hand, and have just enough rein given them, they right themselves very soon, and go as square as a die. You'll see now that James Prescott will marry, and settle down into a regular humdrum life, and be as happy as the day. That's the only existence, Simmel. Lord help us! They talk of the pleasures of excitement,—the miserable fools, if they only knew!" and Kate heaved a deep sigh, and buried her face in her hands.

"Come, come, Kitty," said Simmel, "this will never do. Nothing that you've said can reasonably be applied to your own case. You've had the enjoyment of one style of life, and now let us hope the joys of the other are rapidly coming upon you. You shake your head again. What on earth is the matter with you, child?"

"I can't tell, Simmel," said the girl, raising her tear-blurred face. "I can't tell. I've a horrible weight here," placing her hand upon her heart,—“a something hanging over me; a presentiment of something about to happen,—and I haven't the least notion what,—that never leaves me. I'm as flat as a bad bottle of champagne. By the way, I think I'll try whether a glass of that Madeira wouldn't—”

"No, no, Kitty; for heaven's sake keep off that! The lift given by that is only temporary, and you're twice as down as you were before, when it subsides. You've never asked me one word about my journey yet."

"Your journey! What journey? Oh, to be sure, you said you'd been away, and on my business. Where did you go to?"

"To Newcastle-on-Tyne. To Norton's Fields, just beyond the town; where—"

"Norton's Fields! Newcastle! Why that's where we used to make our pitch with old Fox's Circus, and—"

"And that's exactly the place where old Fox's Circus is pitched at this moment."

"Did you go to it?"

"Why, Kitty, can't you understand that, after what you told me the other day, to visit it, and glean information from its people, was the sole cause of my journey?"

"And did you see them all? Is old Fox still alive; and Madam, with her deep voice and big bony hands; and Lucette and Josephine—big girls now, and doing the *haute-école* business, I suppose; and Brownini, the clown, is he with them yet? and Thompson the bare-backed-rider,—a conceited beast, he was!—and old Bellars the band-leader? Lord, Lord! what happy times those were! happier than I shall ever see again, I know."

"Nonsense, Kate. Your life is just now at its turn. All those horrid days of grinding labour in the circus, all the hard work you've done here, shall be to you like a dream. You shall be a swell, and hold your own with the best of them. Ay, and not merely in money,—I offered you that long since,—but I wanted to prove a position for you, and I *have* proved it, Kitty, my darling!" and Mr. Simmel's usually pale cheeks glowed, and his eyes glistened, and he squeezed Kate's hand in the excitement of his feelings.

"You've found out whose child I am, Simmel?" asked Kate.

"Every thing! I've only got to see your father, and wring from him the confession,—and I have the means of doing that, as safe as houses—and you shall be put in your proper position at once, Kitty, and a capital position it is, too. Your father is a man of great wealth, very highly thought of, moving in the best circles, and eminently respectable."

"And his name?"

"Ah, that I mustn't tell you till next time we meet. It's due to him to let him know how much we have learned, and to give him the option of behaving properly. If he refuse, I can put such a screw on him as will com

pel him at once to do as we wish. And then, Kitty," continued Simnel, dropping his voice, and looking at her fondly from under his bushy eyebrows, "when all my work for you is satisfactorily finished, I shall come to you and ask for my reward."

"You shall have it, Robert," she said simply, placing her hand in his. It was the first time she had called him by his Christian name, and as he heard it a thrill of delight ran through him.

Mr. Simnel had ridden away homeward, and Kate had thrown herself on a sofa in the dining-room, and was vacantly watching the purple gloom creeping up and ingulphing the landscape. Vacantly, I say; for though her eyes were fixed on it, she heeded it not. Simnel's description of his visit had awakened in her a thousand memories of old days. The smell of the stables, the tan, and the sawdust of the ring; the lamps, and the orange-peel in the marquee; the way in which the tent-poles would strain and crack in a high wind, and the audience would look up, as though expecting the crazy edifice to descend on their heads; the swinging naphtha-burners flaring in the draught; the dull flopping sound of the first drops of a thunder-shower on the tent roof, causing an immediate consternation and whispering among the non-umbrellaed spectators,—all these rose before her mind. She recollected all the different stages of her own novitiate; heard old Fox's thin piping voice cursing her freely for "missing her tip" in clearing the garters, or sticking in the silver-papered hoop; and his wife's hoarse growling at her extravagance in tarlatan skirts and rose-pinked stockings. Then, pursuing this train of thought, she remembered what Simnel had said about her parentage; and stung with a sudden idea she sat upright on the sofa, unconsciously tapping her teeth with her nails. Could it not all be made straight? That was what she thought. Her father was a man of position, a man highly thought of and esteemed—so Simnel had said; he could be forced to recognise her as his

daughter,—Simmel swore he should do this. What, then, stood in the way of her being reconciled to, of her being married to Charles Beresford? She had plenty of money as it was, and if her father were rich as stated, could have the command of more. It was her position, the horse-breaking business, that had floored Charley; she saw that at once; but now here she was a recognised swell, bar the illegitimacy; and Charley wouldn't mind that with money, and above all with love—oh, such love!—for him. He would give up every one else for her; he would give up that fair-haired woman.—Ah, good God! the letter! that fatal letter, which she wrote in her mad passion of yesterday! that wild wicked letter was fatal! it would be shown to him; her handwriting would be recognised, and there would be an end to all her hopes.

When the servant came in with the dinner-tray she found her mistress in a swoon.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE HOUSE OF MOURNING.

DEAD! had been dead for half an hour!—so said the first man with an approach to medical knowledge who was called in, and who indeed was a worthy chemist who lived in the neighbourhood, and who, on the strength of a square shop fitted with an oil-cloth floor, with a little fountain in the centre (in the basin of which half-a-dozen bottles of aerated water were always cooling), of a counter bearing glazed cases of scents and cosmetics, of a nest of drawers labelled with illegible half-words, and of three large shining coloured bottles in the window, was regarded by the servants in the vicinity as a weird practitioner indeed. A servant had been despatched in a cab for Dr. Prater; but in the interval pending that luminary's arrival, Mr. Canthar, of the Medical Hall, was master of the position, and all those who were left with the body hung upon his words. It—it had already come to be called “it”—still lay in the library, where it had been found. Mrs. Schröder, who had hurried in close behind Barbara, had, at the very first glimpse of the state of affairs, gone off into a violent fit of hysterics, and had been removed to her room, whither Barbara had followed her, and where the latter was now in close attendance upon her stricken friend. When Mr. Canthar arrived (he had stripped off his black-calico apron and thrown it into the cork-drawer on being summoned, and completed his toilette *en route* by running his fingers through such hair as remained on the sides of his head), he found Mr. Schröder's body stretched out on the sofa in the library, and attended solely by the kitchen-maid

and by a page-boy, who, partly from love to the kitchen-maid, partly from gratitude to his employers, bore her company. The other servants had declined having any thing to do with such horrors, as not coming within their engagements. The great butler had retired to the housekeeper's room, taking with him a bottle of brown sherry, and there these supreme functionaries sat, discussing future prospects; the French cook had gone out to announce to a friend of his, who was steward at a crack club, that he was now open to an engagement; the two footmen, great hulking masses of ignorance and vanity, with faces whiter than the powder on their heads, sat in the pantry, shaking over one glass of hot gin-and-water, and solemnly glozing over the probability of a suggestion made by one of them that "he" (they had never named him) had died of "*spuntanus kymbus-tium*." When Mr. Canthar's sharp ring came at the bell, they both trembled violently, and went up together to open the door. The announcement that their master was dead,—an announcement made by Mr. Canthar after a very cursory examination,—utterly failed in reassuring them; on the contrary, it produced the liveliest symptoms of fright, and they incontinently hurried down stairs to the pantry again. Mr. Canthar required but a very short examination to arrive at his verdict. He placed his finger on the pulse, his ear to the waistcoat; then he took a candle from the attendant kitchen-maid, and looked for an instant into the half-closed glazed eyes. Gently depositing the hand, he said, "Dead! quite dead! been dead for half-an-hour, I suppose. I'm not called upon to state to you my opinion of the cause of death; indeed, it would be quite useless; and as no member of the family has done me the honour to be present,—well, no matter, never mind." Then, in a whisper, "I'd put a cloth round the jaws, don't you know? just bind it together, because—ugly appearance, you understand, Martha—good-night;" and Mr. Canthar tripped out of the house, and devoted the remainder of the evening to working out a composition for the nutriment of the hair,

which, under the name of Canthar's Crinibus, has an enormous circulation over the infant heads of Albertopolis.

Half-an-hour after he had received the message from the servant who had been despatched for him, Dr. Prater spun up in his little low carriage,—hung on C springs to prevent the doctor's highly sensitive organisation being disturbed by bumps or jolts over the horrible pavement,—and drawn by a pair of little bays, which might have been the property of any *millionaire* in the land. The great butler condescended to leave the society of the housekeeper, and to rouse himself so far as to hold open the drawing-room door for the doctor's entrance; also to produce a decanter and a couple of glasses; and placing them at the doctor's elbow, to croak out, "Our '20, sir!" and to fill a wine-glass.

"Ah, thank ye, Pilkington," said the little doctor, taking up the glass, and holding it between his eye and the candle; "this is a dreadful thing, Pilkington."

"Yes, sir," said the butler, shortly; "it's ill-convenient. Do you find the wine agreeable to your taste, sir?"

"Yes, yes, thank ye. I want you now to show me—ah, here's some one coming;" and the door opened, and Barbara Churchill entered the room.

"Mrs. Schröder is very ill, doctor; you must see her before you go, if you please; in her absence I will conduct you. Pilkington—oh, there are lights, I suppose?—this way, doctor;" and she led the way to the library.

This had been Barbara's first experience of death, and it was a severe trial for her, broken down as she was with her other miseries; but she saw how utterly helpless poor little Alice Schröder was, and she determined to help to bear the misery of her sudden misfortune. So she preceded Dr. Prater to the library; and when she had opened the door, she beckoned to the kitchenmaid and page-boy, who were sitting bolt upright on the edge of their chairs, and let the doctor enter by himself, she returning to the dining-room. In a very few minutes she

was joined by the little doctor, who had in the passage composed his face to its usual aspect by this time. "Not the slightest hope, my dear madam,—not the slightest hope. If I had been here the minute after, I could not have been of the least assistance. Must have been instantaneous, my dear madam,—instantaneous,—disease of the heart,—under which I long knew he laboured; but I never told him. What was the need? I've said to myself fifty times, 'Prater, you should tell Mr. Schröder of his danger;' and then, again, I've said to myself, 'What's the use? Mr. Schröder's not a man to relax those gigantic enterprises in which he is engaged, on the mere word of a theorist like myself. He'll only be annoyed at my interference.' There was no cause for any excitement, any special excitement, my dear miss? Pardon me; to whom have I the pleasure of speaking?"

"I am Mrs. Churchill,—I was Miss Lexden,—a very intimate friend of Mrs. Schröder's before her marriage."

"Ay, ay, ay! of course! how very remiss of me not to bear it in mind! Pleasure of including your husband, Mrs. Churchill, among my distinguished literary friends. I hope he's quite himself. Ay, ay; Miss Lexden that was, eh? Think I've had the pleasure of meeting you, before you took rank as a matron, in the house of my dear old friend Sir Marmaduke Wentworth? Ah! I thought so. Ill now, poor dear fellow,—ill in the Pyrenees; hum, ha! And no cause for any special excitement in the present lamentable case, you say, my dear Mrs. Churchill?—hum! Well, well; death from natural causes, of course. I can testify as to his heart-disease. Still, I'm afraid, my dear madam, there'll have to be a horrible—what we call a *post-mortem*. The ridiculous laws of this country are not satisfied with a professional man's word in such cases, and though—of course I'll take care there's no annoyance. Bad thing for Mrs. Schröder,—very! I'll go up and see her directly. By the way, my dear Mrs. Churchill," added the little doctor, edging himself very close to Barbara,

and looking more than ever like an owl; "here's a paper which I picked off the floor of the library when I went in to see our poor late friend just now. I haven't looked at it myself, of course; but perhaps it might be well to put it away, and not to let Mrs. Schröder see it just yet; and," continued the doctor, examining with great attention the pattern of the Turkey carpet, "I don't see that there's any necessity to mention its existence before the coroner's people,—no one else seems to have seen it,—and these things are better kept quiet;" and the doctor handed Barbara a folded paper, which she at once placed in her pocket, and bowed himself out.

Then there fell upon that house confusion, and silence, and sadness, and a general mistiness and ignorance. No one spoke above their breath; no one knew what day of the month it was, or what day of the week, or what length of time had elapsed since the occurrence of the event which had given rise to this state of affairs. All normal laws were suspended; the *carte* for the proposed dinner did not go up as usual in the morning; the great butler suspended his customary inspection of the plate and reviews of the china and glass; the young lady really born in Picardy, but passing current as a Parisian, who was called "Mumzell" by the other servants, and who was attached as special retainer to Mrs. Schröder, had no interviews with her lady on toilet subjects, and found her health undoubtedly improved by being relieved from mental anxiety on the subject of the perpetual invention of new styles of head-dress. The tradesmen seemed to take Mr. Schröder's dying out of the season as a kind of personal affront. Had it happened when every thing was in full swing, the poulterer had remarked, and when parties had the greatest worrit in supplying what parties ordered, why parties might have been glad of a lull; but now, in the slack time of year, when there was few families in town, and what was mostly supplied with game from friends as had shooting, to have a large and reg'lar customer's orders suddenly stopped, as might be said, in this way, was not what parties expected and might be

said to look for. Perhaps the retainers attached to the stable-department took the pleasantest view of matters. It were a bad business, they allowed; but, after all, there must be money left, and the establishment wouldn't be broke up; and besides, a missis were easier to serve than a master, and couldn't pry; not that any thing of that sort could be said of their late guv'nor, for a more innocent man never breathed. He were a bad whip, always a tuggin' at the 'orses' mouths; but a good master. Meanwhile 'orses must be kep' exercised; and so Mrs. Edwards the coachman's wife, and Nancy and Billy her young 'uns, and Susan Gilbert, what was keeping company with Strapper the under-coachman, and one or two convivial friends, had two or three very pleasant days at Richmond and Hampton, proceeding thither in what they called a "weggynet," borrowed from the corn-chandler at the corner of the mews, and drawn now by the chestnuts which Mr. Schröder used to spin along in his mail phaeton, now by the iron-grays which concentrated attention on Mrs. Schröder's equipage in the ring. And in every department of the servants' hall and in the outlying regions connected therewith, there seemed to be an impression of the over-weening necessity for going in for good eating and drinking, as if to counteract the baleful effect of the calamity which had occurred. In the house itself, the kitchenmaid, relieved from attendance in that dread library, gave herself up to the cooking of mighty joints for discussion at the "one-o'clock dinner." The housekeeper and the great butler had little refectations, washed down with brown sherry, in the still-room; while one of the two-gallon stone jars of brown brandy,—originally ordered for preserve-purposes, and of a very different quality from the eau-de-vie-de-cognac in the tapering bottles—was apportioned by the butler to the nightly grog of the servants' hall. Then it was that Rawbert, one of the six-foot Johns, and son of an Oxford scout, first showed his remarkable talent for brewing punch; under the influence of which the assemblage grew so jolly, that some of them were only restrained from break

ing into harmony by the representation of others as to what was lying upstairs.

What was lying upstairs had been moved from the library to a spare bedroom, had been handed over to the charge of such horrible ghoulish women as only appear at such dread times, and had been left all placid and composed and cold and statuesque by itself. What was lying upstairs had had visitors. The coroner—a fat man with a red face, smeared black clothes, beady black eyes, and boots slit here and there as a necessary accommodation for gout—had visited it, had stood at the head of the bed where it lay, and, had it not been for thick carpeting and double doors, would have sent his opinion of it clanging to the ears of her whom it once cherished as its own heart's blood. The jury had visited it (some of them at least, nearly half were too frightened to come beyond the bedroom-door), and had said, "Oh!" and "Deary me!" and had looked at the coroner and gone away again to the Coburg Arms; and then and there, over hot brandy-and-water, administered as a corrective, and strongly recommended by the coroner, had found a verdict of "Death from natural causes." Then it had other visitors—men in black, who took off their coats at the door and left their boots outside, putting on list slippers, and who had foot-rules, and who whistled to themselves softly as they went about their ghastly work. These men came again at night with others, blundering up the stairs under the weight of a horrible burden, and the room assumed a different aspect, and what lay therein seemed further removed from humanity and less kin to any thing it had hitherto claimed kinship with. And after that, it had yet another visitor; a white-robed woman, who stole in at night and knelt at the side of its black prison-house, and implored pardon for past waywardness and thoughtlessness and girlish follies, and prayed for strength and succour and support; then rising, pressed her lips on its cold forehead, and was led from the room in a half-hysterical state.

Yes; Alice Schröder had begun to wake to the reali-

ties of life, to find that opera-boxes and drums and seal-skin-cloaks and equipages and money, all good things in their way, were powerless against Death; and that Death was not merely the bugbear which he had been always painted, but had other qualities horrific in their nature, which she at least had never imputed to him. He was a thought-compeller, and up to that time little Alice had never known what thinking was. But now she thought long and earnestly. She thought of her earlier days, long before she had received her father's orders as to her marriage; she thought of her school-girl flirtations and hopes and fears and intentions as to matrimony; recalling the cavalry cornet, the light-whiskered curate, and the Italian singing-master vividly in her memory. Then she had a vague recollection of her coming-out and her town-life, through all which there loomed a shadowy presentment of Captain Lyster, standing specially boldly out in her remembrance of her stay at Bissett Grange; and then came Mr. Townshend's imperative decision, and her acceptance of her dead husband's offer. Had she behaved well to that dead husband, who had behaved so kindly to her? Ah, how painfully, as though with an actual sting, came back the recollection of his kindness, of his lavish generosity; how with clumsy action and ill-chosen words, but showing in the highest degree the warmth of his affection and the delicacy of his mind, he had loaded her with gifts, and had endeavoured to forestall her every wish! How, with an evident struggle,—for had he not been matured to it from his youth up?—yet successfully, he had weaned himself from the cares of business (at one time his greatest pleasure), and learnt a new life in the society of his wife, and in manifesting his devotion to her. Had she brought him such wealth of affection as he had showered upon her? Had she even met him half-way? When she was a girl, she was fond of being considered “highly romantic” by her companions; she thought herself the essence of romance; and yet what was her romance compared to that shown by that elderly gray-headed German merchant, who had changed the

whole tenor of his life for a woman's love? And had he possessed that love? that was the bitterest question of all. Respect, yes; honour, yes; but did she respect Mr. Beresford,—she certainly did not honour him,—who had so often been her companion during her husband's lifetime? had she not had a warmer feeling towards that accomplished cavalier? had she not permitted him to speak in somewhat slighting terms, to which she by her silence had given tacit approval, of the dead man; ridiculing his age and habits, unfitting him for finding favour in ladies' eyes, and protesting against the hard fate which cast such pearls before such swine? All this came up clear and fresh in Alice Schröder's memory; and as it rose she hated Beresford with all her strength; and, struck with deepest remorse, wished—oh, how she wished!—that the time would come over again, that she might dower her husband with her love, and show how she appreciated his devotion to her.

Then what was lying there lay no longer. There came a morning when the boys in the neighbouring mews, who had been on the look-out for some little time, passed the word to each other that it was all right for that day, and forthwith coming trooping out, took up their positions in available spots close by. The mutes in their preposterous scarves, and bearing their hideous banners, mounted guard at the door; and the hearse and the mourning-coaches pulled-up close by; and the red-nosed men got ready the trays of feathers, and the long staves, and the velvet trappings, and all the funeral insignia, which would be ridiculous were they not disgusting. And the company arrived at the house: there were two of the dead man's brothers, representing the firm respectively in Hamburg and Paris; uncles and cousins, pillars of the London Exchange; the clerk from the office, who had acted as the dead man's private secretary, and who was a very presentable young man, the delight of the evening-party-givers of Surbiton; Mr. M'Quiddit from Bedford Row, who was met on the door-step by his clerk, who presented him with an oblong packet, which the

lawyer deposited in the library before joining the rest of the company ; and little Dr. Prater, looking preternaturally solemn and wise,—all these gathered together to see Gustav Schröder to his grave. On the dining-room table were cold fowls (already cut up, and tied together with pieces of black crape) and cold viands ; but save Mr. M'Quiddit, who had come up from his country-house at Datchet and was hungry, no one tasted food. The decanters, however, were put into requisition ; and the great butler took occasion to whisper in Dr. Prater's ear a recommendation of some *Vino di Pasta* as being something special. Then came that most horrid time of all, when there was a bumping and a scuffling on the stairs, and a creaking of the bannisters. Every body knew what caused it and what it meant ; and there was an involuntary silence which made the talk, when they began again to talk, seem more hollow and forced than it had been before. Then, draped in silk scarves, and wearing hats swaddled in crape, the mourners ascended the coaches, walking to them through a lane of boys, and were borne off to Kensal Green ; on alighting at the gates of which dismal necropolis, they were marshalled into proper order by the head undertaker, and so marched in procession to the grave. There a gentleman, who really could not be complained of when it was remembered that he had done duty four times already that day, and expected to do it three times again, half drawled, half cantered through the most beautiful service of the Church, that for the burial of the dead, without the smallest atom of expression, and apparently without knowing what he was about ; then he shut his book, and the bystanders one by one looked into the grave—and all was over. The mourning-coaches, which had come so slowly, went merrily back ; the Schröders went to the City house, and sent telegrams and read share-lists, and talked of how soon Gustav's share in the concern ought to be realised ; the uncles and cousins did much the same ; the presentable clerk had a holiday, and met a few lady friends at the Zoological Gardens ; Dr. Prater lunched at

a rich patient's, where he told the story of Mr. Schröder's death, and dined at another rich patient's where he told it again; and Mr. McQuiddit had an interview with the widow and gave her a short abstract of the will, which was eminently satisfactory.

It had been proposed by the deceased gentleman's brothers, who were his executors, that the widow should leave town for a few weeks,—should run down to Brighton or Tunbridge Wells,—and thus, in change of scene, shake off the excess of grief under which they found her to be really labouring. But under a strange state of feeling which is scarcely describable, but which originated in an idea that her determination to do her duty to the utmost would not be properly carried out, were she to allow herself any thing like indulgence, poor little Alice decided upon stopping in Saxe-Coburg Square and thenceforward entering upon the useful state of life which she had proposed to herself. Perhaps in this decision she was a little guided by her feeling for Barbara: the regard which had always existed between them (regard on Barbara's side mingled with a sense of superiority leading to pity, the regard which a grand Scotch deerhound might feel for a little thin-limbed Italian greyhound pet) had very much increased since the recent calamity. Alice had experienced a sisterly tenderness at Barbara's hands which she had never thought Barbara capable of feeling; Barbara had seen in Alice a fixed propriety of purpose such as she had never given Alice credit for. And Alice was by no means so selfish or so thoroughly wrapped up in her own grief as not to see that, although Barbara pretended to look upon her own married career as entirely at an end, yet in reality she had by no means given up all hope of a happy reconciliation with Frank. A sudden peal at the bell would make her cheek flame; her nervousness at the sight of Pilkington entering the room with letters was unmistakable; and in a thousand other ways she gave evidence of her heart's yearnings. So Alice felt that while this

unsettled state of affairs lasted, Barbara's home must be with her, and that a removal from town would be highly antagonistic to any chance of a settlement which might transpire; and as this entirely coincided with her own views, she elected to remain in town.

Mr. Schröder's will had been made a few months before his death, and was in accordance with the general tenor of his married life. It ordered that his share in the City firm should be realised at the earliest favourable opportunity, and that it and all his other investments should be lodged in the name of trustees for his wife's use and disposal. As this represented a very large annual income, and as the details of the will soon became public through the medium of the press, the "kind-inquiries" cards began to shower down in Saxe-Coburg Square. You, who are rich, find these amicable condolences sent in at once, in such times. You, who are poor, know that in general there is a little hanging fire until it is understood what will be the future position of the family. In the present day the vast proportion of middle-class people occupy a factitious position in society; factitious, that is to say, thus far—that its existence depends entirely on the life of the father, husband, breadwinner. So long as his good income is made, so good; but when he dies, despite all his attempts at laying-by, his precautions in insuring his life, the whole thing changes; all the little luxuries have to be given up, and the family sinks into a decidedly lower circle of society. That is why the great law-giver Society waits to hear the will read before he nods approval on visits of condolence being paid. In this case there could be not much doubt about money; but there were some peculiar features,—“a sudden death, my dear, and that sort of thing;” and it was thought better by Mrs. Grundy, and her set, to wait a little, until there could be no possible doubt on the matter. After a little time, the intimates of the house were admitted. Old Mr. Townshend was still away on the Continent; and there never seemed to have been any other member of the Townshend family; but

the Schröders came down in flocks. The wives of the brothers, and the sisters, and the daughters' nieces, and cousins twice removed,—who so kind as they in time of trouble? Their husbands and fathers might be money-grubbers in the City of London; in them was nothing but the good old German spirit of kindness, of brotherhood and sisterhood, of honest help and open-handed affection, which had first flourished when they were all poor strugglers in the Frankfort Judengasse, which had lasted until they were among the most opulent of the earth. And Dr. Prater was there, of course, every day, chirrupping softly about the house, and going from thence up and down and into the ends of the London world, and talking of the enormous wealth left by his poor deceased friend Mr. Schröder to his interesting patient Mrs. Schröder. And Captain Lyster came, sending up his card, and proffering his services in any manner in which they might be required; and then Barbara saw him; and after a little time Alice saw him; and his services were brought into requisition, and proved to be eminently useful. For when Fred Lyster chose to shake off his drawl, and to apply himself, there were few men with a quicker or a keener appreciation of what ought to be; and in settling affairs, there were numerous cases arose in which a lady could not possibly interfere, and in which the intervention of some one prompt, clear-headed, and business-like, was indispensable. And as Fred Lyster had never any thing to do, he had full leisure to attend to these matters, and entered into them with an eagerness and a perseverance which astonished all who saw him—save Barbara, who perhaps might have made a shrewd guess as to the mainspring of his actions. Poor George Pringle had called too. He had been a good deal cut up by the death of Mr. Schröder, whom he had been accustomed to describe as “a good old cock, sir; a worthy old party; kind-hearted and all that, and giving no end good feeds;” and he had, in his rough way, great sympathy for his cousin Alice,—“a poor little thing, sir; left alone, with nothing to console her.”

With consolation-end in view, Mr. Pringle arrived one Sunday afternoon at the door of the house in Saxe-Coburg Square, in a hansom cab, whence he extracted a smooth English white terrier, with a black patch over one eye. Taking this animal under his arm, he, after making due inquiries after Mrs. Schröder's health, transferred it to the frightened grasp of Pilkington, requesting that it might be at once carried up-stairs with his love. Pilkington was horribly frightened,—he “never could abide dawgs;” and so no sooner was the door closed than he set the animal down in the hall, where, catching sight of the well-fed calves of Rawbert the footman, it presently began to lick its lips, and growled in a very ominous manner.

Mr. Beresford called three times: once immediately after the announcement of the death, when he simply left his card; once on the day after the funeral, when, besides his card, he left a warm message of inquiry; once a fortnight after, when “he hoped he might be permitted to see Mrs. Schröder.” Barbara was with Alice in her boudoir when this message arrived; and she noticed that the poor little woman went deadly white as she listened, and then flushed deeply.

“Oh, no, no!” she exclaimed; “I cannot see him. Barbara darling, I never will see him again. I hate the mention of his name; it jars upon me now; I cannot tell you how—oh, no, no!” And so Barbara framed a polite reply in Alice's name, and Mr. Beresford went away.

That night, as Barbara sat in her own room, feeling very weary and worn, and with an irrepressible yearning towards her husband and her home, the tears rose in her eyes; and, determined not to indulge in the luxury of “a good cry,” she drew out her handkerchief, and with it a paper, which fell to the ground at her feet. Looking down at it as it lay there, she recognised the paper which had been found in the library, and handed to her by Dr. Prater, on the night of Mr. Schröder's death, and which had ever since entirely escaped her recollection. She

picked it up from the carpet, and opened it; but no sooner had her eyes fallen on the inside than she gave a start of astonishment, and uttered a low cry. The same!—unquestionably the same handwriting! The circumstances connected with both previous occasions of her having seen it far too deeply impressed it on her mind to allow of her being mistaken. It was that long scrawly handwriting—unmistakably that of a woman only partially educated—in which the letters to Frank Churchill—that delivered at Bissett, and the envelope found in the dressing-room—had both been addressed. If Barbara's heart beat fast when her eyes first fell upon the lines, how much more disturbed was she when she read their contents, as follows:

“Your wife is false to you, and is carrying on with a Mr. Beresford. They meet every day, ride together, and deceive you. Watch them, and you will find this out. It has been going on for some time—for months. It is a thing that Beresford has meant for a long time; and he always carries out what he means. I know him well.

“A FRIEND.”

It was, then, the receipt of this letter which had had such fatal effect on poor Mr. Schröder. He had fallen, pierced to the heart by this anonymous stab. Any excitement, any worry, or anxiety, coming suddenly on him, might have ended his life at any time, Dr. Prater had said; and so—Dr. Prater? It was he who had picked up this paper from the library-floor, on to which it had fallen from the dead man's hand. The doctor had asked her whether there had been any cause for sudden excitement; had suggested that the paper should not be shown to Mrs. Schröder; that its existence need not be mentioned before the coroner. He had read it, then. Barbara had no need to think twice to assure herself on that point. That the imputations on Alice which the anonymous letter conveyed were unfounded, Barbara had not the smallest doubt. She knew that her friend, though thoughtless, had never, even in thought, been guilty;

and knew that she now bitterly repented her levity and silliness. It would be worse than cruel to let her know of the existence of this document; it must be kept from her at all hazards. Alice's horror of Mr. Beresford was now so great as to require no fanning; and Barbara was certain that of her own free will the widow would never see him again. But in the event of Mr. Beresford's demanding an interview, what was to be done then? Poor Barbara found it impossible to answer this self-proposed question; and there was no one to whom she could apply for advice. Captain Lyster had been her mainstay in several cases; but this was a delicate matter, which it was impossible to make him acquainted with. Oh, if she only had Frank to turn to! and that sent her thoughts reverting to the handwriting. Whose could it be?—who could be the owner of that fatal *griffe*, which seemed to bring desolation with it wherever it arrived? And at the end of her reverie, finding herself no clearer in her suspicions than she was at first, Barbara locked the note into her desk, and determined to leave to chance the use she might eventually make of it.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

ET TU BRUTE !

ON the morning succeeding the day on which Mr. Schröder died, Mr. Simmel sat in his room in the Tin-Tax Office, deep in a reverie. The newspaper lay on the floor at his feet; he was slowly rubbing the knee from which it had just fallen, and his other hand supported his chin. The news had come upon him suddenly; and he was calmly thinking to what results the occurrence might tend. Had he been at his club the night before, he would have heard the whisper which, thanks to Dr. Prater, was then permeating the West End; but on his return from Kate Mellon's, Mr. Simmel had quietly dined in his own rooms, and there remained for the rest of the evening, arranging his plans. Thus the first intimation which he had received of the event was from the columns of the newspaper then lying at his feet; in which a paragraph headed "Sudden death of a City-merchant" had speedily claimed his attention. Matters of weighty importance had Mr. Simmel to filter through his mind in the course of that reverie. He was a worldly-minded man, but by no means a bad man at heart; and the fact of the rich man's death at that particular time struck him as specially touching and softening. The newspaper described the anguish of the dead man's widow as "inexpressible;" and though Simmel, from his experience, was not inclined to lay much stress on the exactness of that statement, yet he felt that in all probability the little woman of whom he had heard so much, would probably be very much distressed. From all he had learned, he believed that of late the relations between her and her

husband had been very much deepened and strengthened. He guessed somewhat of this from the fact that Beresford had been more than infrequent and shy in his allusions to that *ménage*, and to the pursuit he was engaged in in that quarter. Beresford? By Jove! then his chance was come much sooner than either of them had anticipated! the great obstacle was removed, and he had the course clear before him. No, not exactly clear; the manner of her husband's death, the suddenness of it, would create a great revulsion in Mrs. Schröder's mind, and greatly imperil Mr. Beresford's chances, however strong they might be. Whether they were strong or not was a matter of doubt in Mr. Simmel's mind; he had a great contempt for Beresford's word, knowing him to be possessed of a happy inability to speak truth; and sometimes he doubted whether his colleague had really made any play worth mentioning at the house in Saxe-Coburg Square. Then Mr. Simmel began rubbing his knee more violently than ever, as he thought that the whole affair from first to last was very disreputable, and one which redounded to the credit of no one engaged in it. Would it not be better to drop Mr. Beresford altogether, and leave him to fight his own way in the matter? It certainly would be more honourable and satisfactory in every way; but then—why then, if Mr. Beresford did not marry some rich woman (and Mrs. Schröder was his best chance), he would go to the dogs; and then what would become of his, Simmel's, eight hundred and twenty five pounds? Worse still, if Beresford did not succeed with Mrs. Schröder, he might suddenly veer round, and on the impulse of the moment, and under the pressure of creditors, go up and declare for Kate Mellon's hand. And Simmel was by no means certain that that young woman would decline such an offer, even after all that had occurred; on the contrary, being naturally suspicious, and on the present occasion jealous and in love, the thought sent such a twinge through him, that he shrugged his shoulders, and made up his mind that things must take their course.

As he sat there, rubbing his leg much more calmly after arriving at this determination, the door opened, and Mr. Beresford entered the room. He nodded airily, and, pointing to the newspaper on the floor, said, "You've seen it, of course? That chattering doctor-fellow was right, you see. What do you think of it?"

"Of it? of what? of Mr. Schröder's death, do you mean? I think it a very sad thing."

"The devil you do!" said Mr. Beresford with a sneering laugh; "the door's shut, Simmel; don't you think you'd better drop that innocence when you and I are alone together?"

He was a cur, this man, and instinctively a cad; he had been as miserable as possible for weeks; but he thought he saw the breaking-up of the dark clouds now, and immediately began to swagger and hector on the strength of it.

"Be good enough to understand, Mr. Beresford, that that is language which I don't permit *any body* to use to me!" said Simmel, through his shut teeth, and with a very white face; "I repeat that I think Mr. Schröder's death a very sad thing. Why do you choose to sneer when I say so?"

"No, no, not sneer: hang it, old fellow! you take one up so infernally sharp. Bad thing, of course it is, for him, poor devil; but good thing for me; and as you know rather more of me than you did of him, I fancied I should have had your congratulations."

"Oh, I see," said Simmel; "you fancy you ought to have received my congratulations: on what, may I ask?"

"Look here, Simmel!" said Beresford, turning savagely round; "drop this infernal nonsense; it doesn't do here, and it's ill-timed. Don't come the *non-mi-ricordo* business, after having been arch-conspirator and suggested every thing. Plainly, the death of this unfortunate man is in my favour, because he was the principal obstacle in my way to the success of our scheme; and he is removed."

"Well; looking at it in that way——"

"In that way! in what other way would you look at it? It's in a remarkably *à s. d.* kind of way that it presents itself to me, I can tell you. I don't mind mentioning now, Simnel, what I shouldn't have let on otherwise; that I'm tremendously dipped; in for—ay, I daresay, three thousand more than you know any thing about; and here's the chance come just in the nick of time."

"Where did you get in for this? and where did you get the money?"

"Get in for it? Doncaster, the Cæsarewitch, the Cambridgeshire! each infernal thing went to the bad. I stood a cracker on the first; then tried a pull through with the other two; and was all wrong with the lot. Scadgers, Parkinson, and a new man, Barnett, of Stamford Street, over the water, did the advances; but I should have looked very blue, if this hadn't come off, I can tell you."

"You're a little sanguine, are you not? It *hasn't* come off yet, has it?"

"What a wet blanket you are, Simnel! No, of course not. Indeed there's been a strong element of virtue and duty, and all that sort of thing, introduced of late. But now there's no necessity for that. The actual fancy and liking always existed, I flatter myself; and now all that can be indulged in without the slightest suspicion of vice."

"To be sure, to be sure," muttered Mr. Simnel, ruminating; "you'll have to proceed very cautiously; but that you'll of course understand." Mr. Beresford, by this time half way to the door, nodded his head and went out.

Some few days afterwards Mr. Simnel was again honoured by a visit in his room from the Commissioner. The latter gentleman looked worn and tired; he threw himself into a chair and began beating his boot with his cane, and seemed altogether out of sorts. Mr. Simnel noticed all this, and was tolerably prepared for what was coming. "What's the matter, sir?" he asked quietly;

"have you had too many papers to sign; or are you annoyed at having to come down to this plebeian part of the town so early as two o'clock; or haven't you had your lunch; or what is it?"

"Don't chaff, Simnel; I'm not in the humour for chaff just now. I'm afraid I'm getting into a hole at last."

"What's the matter now?"

"Oh, these infernal fellows are putting on the screw—lawyer's letters, writs, and all that rascally machinery; and I don't see a chance of staving them off. If I could have said any thing about a rich marriage now—"

"That's exactly what I was coming to. How about Saxe-Coburg Square?"

"Well, fishy, very fishy. I've called there three times; the last time sending in specially and particularly to say that I wanted to speak to her; and still the same answer—compliments—not kind regards, you know—compliments, and utterly unable to see me. No hint of a future opportunity—nothing!"

"That looks badly, certainly. What do you intend to do?"

"Do! Go there again. Have it out, by hook or by crook. By Jove, I will see her! I'll remind her that—"

"Doesn't this strike you as devilish low behaviour? Don't you see that to thrust yourself in where you are evidently not wanted, to break in upon the privacy of a lady, who is in the beginning of her first great sorrow—"

"Oh, drop that, please. Doesn't it strike you that I owe you nearly nine hundred pounds, and other people a great deal more; and that if they're not paid, I shall be arrested and sold up? And don't you see, therefore, that I *must*—No, by Jove! I don't see why I should; you're quite right; it is an ungentlemanly business, and I'm sick of all this dodging and duffing and forcing myself down the throat of a woman whose liking for me seems to have gone off. But there's one who would still seem to care about me, Simnel, my boy, I'll wager any money; and one whom I've been a fool not to think of before—Kate Mellon!"

"Kate Mellon?" echoed Mr. Simmel with scowling brows.

"Yes, Kate Mellon! She's got ready-money enough to pay off all my ticks and set me square; and then I could keep square. I'm sure she'd forget all that stupid business of which I told you; though I've never seen her since. I could put that right in a minute; and—"

"I don't think it would do," said Mr. Simmel earnestly—"I don't think it would do. Miss Mellon's status in society would be fatal to all your hopes of advancement. Your aunt Lady Lowndes and the bishop would cut you dead; and remember," added he, after a pause, and with an attempt at a smile, very ghastly and gummy and forced, "I am interested in this matter to the extent of eight hundred pounds, and I don't think it would do. I'm disposed to recommend you to hold to the other, which appears to me to want only a little patience, and—if I understand from you the security of your position—an undoubted declaration to bring to a favourable issue."

"And what would you advise?"

"A letter. I will draft you what I should suggest; and if you approve, you can copy it, or embody it in any thing else you have to say to Mrs. Schröder;" and Mr. Simmel sat down at once at his desk and began to write. Mr. Beresford sat watching him the while. Not a change in Simmel's face, not an inflexion of his voice, had escaped him; and he wondered what it all meant, and in what Kate Mellon's fortunes could have influence over the impassible secretary of the Tin-Tax Office.

Two days after this interview, Mr. Beresford called in Saxe-Coburg Square and sent up his card, requesting an interview with Mrs. Schröder. The usual message of excuse being returned to him, he gave the servant a letter which he had brought with him, and begged that the man would take it to his mistress; he would await the answer. Mrs. Schröder, seated in her boudoir, read the note, seemed greatly disturbed, told the man that

she would send an answer downstairs by her maid, and immediately rushed off to the adjacent bedroom, where Barbara Churchill was lamenting all that had happened, and wondering what was to be the end of her life.

"O Barbara, Barbara darling, what shall I do?" exclaimed the poor little woman; "here is Mr. Beresford come again, and he wanted to see me, and I said *no*, as we had determined, and then he sent me up this dreadful letter! Oh, what shall I say to him, dear? oh, do help me, there's a darling."

Barbara took the letter from Alice's shaking hand and read it. It was not a pleasing composition; it began in an injured tone, and then grew mysterious, and then almost threatening. The writer demanded an interview, and justified his demand by referring to certain bygone circumstances which the reader would readily remember; and the whole tone was sentimentally prurient and offensive and objectionable in the highest degree. Poor little Alice had not seen any thing of this kind in it; she had merely found it "horrid" and "impertinent;" but Barbara's cheek flamed as she perused it, and the tone of her voice was rather sharp as she said, "Is the man still here, Alice?"

"What man, dear? Mr. Beresford?"

"Of course!—is there any other? Oh, he is here. Very well, then, leave me this letter, and I will go down and speak to him about it."

"You'll see him, Barbara?"

"Yes," said Barbara, who was already opening her desk and looking for something therein. "It will be the best way. You'll find he won't trouble you any more." She kissed Alice at the door, and walking down stairs and into the drawing-room, confronted Mr. Beresford.

That gentleman was seated near the window with a book of photographs, at which he was not looking, in his hand. He rose as he heard the door open, and advanced rapidly when he saw the female figure: the room was somewhat darkened by heavy curtains, and he could

not clearly make out who it was. When Barbara, stopping, pulled herself to her full height, he stopped, too, disappointed; he expected some one far less majestic.

"You wished to see Mrs. Schröder, I believe, Mr. Beresford," said Barbara, after the first salutation: "I come as her representative."

"I am very sensible of the honour you do me, Mrs. Churchill," replied Beresford; "but I fear that no representative will do. I want to speak to Mrs. Schröder herself."

"That is impossible," said Barbara, calmly.

"Impossible is a very strong word, Mrs. Churchill. I sent Mrs. Schröder a letter—"

"Oh, yes, here it is; it is about this letter that I have come to you. You'll sit, Mr. Beresford, please; for this is likely to be a prolonged talk. Now you know that I am Mrs. Schröder's oldest and most intimate friend, and as such I am deputed to answer this letter."

"Pardon me, I have no grounds for believing the latter part—"

"Except my word; and you won't doubt that? No! I thought not! Now, Mr. Beresford, I am about to speak very plainly to you, always relying on you as a gentleman. Mrs. Schröder is very young, and rather thoughtless and not too much gifted with brains. Since you have been acquainted with her, both before and after marriage, you have paid her small attentions, such as no woman dislikes. They were attentions such as the rigidly-censorious might shake their heads at; but which no woman, knowing her own rectitude and conscious of the proper understanding existing between her husband and herself, need have been afraid of. But the case is altered now! Poor Alice is unfortunately in the position of having no husband as her guide and safeguard, and—these attentions must cease!"

"You speak as Mrs. Schröder's mouthpiece, Mrs. Churchill?"

"Precisely! In this letter which I have here, there is a tone which I am sure you did not intend to convey;

but about which it is my duty to speak to you plainly. Under present circumstances Mrs. Schröder feels it necessary to limit her knowledge of you to that of the merest acquaintance. There is no other footing on which you can know each other. If you were not what I know you to be, a gentleman, I should point out that there is not, nor ever has been, any thing between you which could lead you to any other supposition—no letters, no any thing which ill-natured persons could lay hold of—you follow me?”

“Ye-es, ye-es!” said Beresford, feeling that he was outwitted.

“That is right—so, as you are a gentleman, I don’t mind telling you the urgent necessity for the adoption of this course. Notwithstanding the absence of any such evidence as I have spoken of, the world has chosen to talk.”

“Ah, ah!” said Mr. Beresford, with a smile of returning satisfaction.

“Yes, in its usual base and unfounded manner. Here is an anonymous letter which was addressed to the late Mr. Schröder.”

“Let me look at it!” said Beresford, eagerly.

“It is here;” and Barbara handed to him the paper picked off the library-floor by Dr. Prater.

Mr. Beresford took the letter from her hand. The instant his eye fell on the handwriting, Barbara, who was looking at him steadfastly, saw his colour change and his hand shake. But he read it through without saying a word, and returned it to her with a bow.

“You will see now, Mr. Beresford, the utter impossibility of Mrs. Schröder’s permitting her acquaintance with you to continue,” said Barbara. “You will see that the note which you addressed to her can have no answer but that which I have already given you; and that henceforth, as a gentleman, you are bound in honour not to—”

“Of course! of course!” replied Beresford; “it is of the other letter I am thinking now.” And he set his

teeth and struck his ungloved hand violently with his cane. "You have introduced a new element into the discussion, Mrs. Churchill, and you must pardon me if I close it here. What my future course may be, circumstances must determine: I make no promise, as I make no threats; but—"

"We will close the discussion at once, sir, if you please!" said Barbara, haughtily.

"At once," said Beresford, with a bow. "Believe me that the advocacy of that anonymous person—whose handwriting I recognise—though useful perhaps, as time may prove—is by no means flattering."

He bowed again and left the room. "By no means flattering!" echoed Barbara after he had gone; "it is, then, as I suspected, some horrible wretch who has cast this shadow over my life!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

BALTHAZAR.

MR. SIMNEL sat calmly over his breakfast in his rooms in Piccadilly, little dreaming of all that had occurred on the previous day in Saxe-Coburg Square. He skimmed the newspaper; he dallied with his toast; he laid down his knife and fork and paused in his meal, smiling to himself with the air of a man who had reason for self-gratulation. Such reason had Mr. Simnel. He had fought a very long and arduous and up-hill fight—a fight in which the odds were all against him, and which he had won entirely by patience and excellent generalship. And now the difficulties were surmounted; the land lay straight before him; and he was just about to clutch the prize which, with so much trouble, he had won. “You shall have it, Robert!” those were the last words which she had said to him; words which haunted his memory, which he found himself repeating over and over again. The woman he had loved so long and so quietly, who at one time appeared far beyond the power of his grasp, had succumbed; he had won her honestly, and by his own tact and perseverance; and she would be his own! There would be a bar sinister in her escutcheon, but what of that? Against herself, against the propriety of her conduct, no one had ever dared to drop a hint. Her father should make such a settlement on her as, coupled with his own money, would relieve her from the necessity of pursuing her then occupation, of doing any thing but play her part as mistress of her house, and enjoy herself. What a fool was Beresford!—ah, that opened up a fresh vein of thought! He had said

yesterday that, failing in his pursuit of Mrs. Schröder, he should fall back on Kate Mellon, and try and patch up that severed alliance. Simmel's heart beat loudly as this recurred to his mind; he knew how deep had been the attachment which Kate had formed for Beresford, and he was not sure that she would not be even yet willing to listen to proposals of peace. She must not have the chance—that was what he determined; and he rang his bell hurriedly, and sat biting his nails until it was answered.

"You saw Mr. Scadgers?" he demanded of his servant.

"Yes, sir; he will be at your office at one o'clock."

"Good; now go over at once to Austin Friars to Mr. Townshend's office. Tell the head-clerk," said he, taking a telegraphic despatch from his pocket, "that his master will arrive at London Bridge at half-past one, and that he must send some one to meet him. Say that I shall be with Mr. Townshend at three sharp. You understand?" The valet answered in the affirmative and left the room, returning in a few minutes and ushering in Mr. Beresford. That gentleman looked any thing but happy; his face was of a dull leaden hue, his eyes were dull and red-rimmed, and the tell-tale muscles of his mouth were working visibly. He flung himself into a chair, and as soon as the door closed, said: "Here's a devil of a go!"

"What's the matter, man?" asked Simmel. "Look here—you're all out of sorts—lips going and hands shaking—just steady yourself before you speak. Here!" and he unlocked a sideboard and placed a liqueur-stand before his friend.

"That's better!" said Beresford, draining a wine-glass of brandy. "I am all wrong, and enough to make me! Thought I'd catch you here before you went down to work. I've no end to tell you—"

"Tell on!" said Mr. Simmel; and, so encouraged, Beresford narrated every thing that had occurred between him and Barbara the preceding day, respecting

the anonymous letter and the conversation that had ensued thereanent, word for word.

As Mr. Simmel listened his heart sunk within him, and it was with the greatest difficulty that he prevented himself from displaying his emotion. He succeeded, however, so admirably, that though the colour of his face might have gone a shade or two paler, not a muscle of it moved, and when Beresford stopped, he said, without a tremor in his voice, "What do you intend to do?"

"To do!" screamed Beresford—"well, upon my soul, Simmel, you are a wonderful man! I tell you this tremendous story, which, for heartless villany, beats any thing I ever heard—and done by a woman too!—and all you ask is, what I intend to do! Do!—I intend to punish that she-devil, cost what it may! to—"

"Steady, sir! you're using strong language—"

"Oh! what! Kate Mellon, I mean; not Mrs. Schröder—my mind's made up with regard to her! I shall—"

"Look here, Beresford; did you come here to rave and storm before me, or to ask my advice?—which?"

"I don't know what the deuce you mean by raving and storming! You'd do the same if you'd been treated in this way by a—there, never mind, I'll take your advice if—"

"If it agrees with your own plans! generous creature! Now look here; you're in a horrible state of rage and fever, in which you can do no good. My advice to you is, to go away straight at once. Go out of town somewhere for a fortnight, and then come back and see how the land lies."

"And so lose every chance I've got! No, thank ye. You know all that business yesterday was Mrs. Churchill, not Mrs. Schröder. I don't believe the widow knows a word about that cursed letter; and there may be a chance of getting over her yet, though that Churchill woman is as deep as the Whissendine. She and I always hated each other, I think, and I don't intend to let her beat me now; no! I've sent a line to Mrs. Schröder marked

private, without any flummery of former days, or any thing of that sort,—simply begging her to meet me in the Row this afternoon, and give me five minutes' talk. If she does that, I think I can put matters square; and if not—”

“And if not?”

“Well, if not, by George, Simnel, up goes the sponge, and no mistake. There are three writs out against me, and I fancy some of Sloman's people are on. There have been some fellows hanging about my door in South Audley Street; and I fancy, from what Stephens says, they were any thing but the right sort. What are you thinking about?”

“I was thinking,” said Mr. Simnel slowly, “that if this Schröder business does not come off,—and I don't think it will,—you'd better send in a certificate from Prater or some one, and get away to the Continent for six months.”

“Well, we'll wait and see what to-day brings forth, at all events. If it don't do, I'll very likely take your advice.”

After Mr. Beresford had gone, Mr. Simnel sat with his feet on the fender, slowly rubbing his knee. “It must be hurried through at once,” he said to himself. “I'll square the settlement to-day; and if Beresford fails with Mrs. Schröder, he must be got out of town and abroad. Vengeance, eh? no, not quite that, my fine fellow. Long before you come back, there'll be somebody with a right to interfere, if any thing like vengeance is threatened.”

And how fared it with Kate Mellon all this while? what had happened to the pivot on which so many schemes of love and hate, of worship and revenge, were turning? In a bad way was Kate Mellon, mentally and thence physically. The news of Mr. Schröder's death, which she had read accidentally in an “odds and ends” column of a cheap sporting-paper, had come upon her with a terrific shock. She had compared dates, and

found that it had happened on the day after the despatch of her letter ; and though there was nothing to create any connexion between the circumstances, she felt a kind of horrible impression that by her act she had hastened his end. This preyed upon her mind ; and as she had no one in whom to confide—(had Simnel come up in the interval, it is probable that she would have told him all, for the sake of getting a scrap of consolation, of advice—of mere talk—so weightily did the retention of the secret lie on her),—she fretted and worried herself, and each day grew more feverish, more unsettled, more discontented. One horrible thought she had, which swallowed up all the rest—might not she unconsciously have helped her rival to her happiness ! If this fair-haired woman cared for Charley, as had been stated (and as she had seen with her own eyes), she could not have cared for her husband. He was now removed, and there was nothing to prevent a marriage between them. Here was a phantom which nothing could lay ; a spectre which would haunt her day and night, ever mocking and gibing at her ; and she tossed in ceaseless torture, and grew paler and thinner, and took less interest in her business every day.

On the day on which Mr. Beresford and Mr. Simnel had the conversation just narrated, Kate Mellon lay on the sofa in her little drawing-room, listless and drowsy, as was her wont nowadays, and with her head buried in her hands. She roused herself at a loud knock at the door, and bade the person enter. It was old Freeman, the stud-groom.

“Here’s Hockley, miss, just coom down from town staäbles. Black harse from Ireland, ’raived last neet.”

“What horse, Freeman ?”

“Waät harse, eh ? Mai bairn, thee’rt gangin’ daft wi’ soommut ; ai heeard not waät ! Waät harse ? why, black harse we bought of Markis Clonmel—black hoonter which Johnson wrote aboot last week.”

“Ay, ay, I recollect ! What does Hockley say of him ?”

"Hockley says he's tearer ! groom as browt him to steamer said as nowt could hold him ! I'se warrant we teach him manners !"

"Yes ; I'll do that myself, and at once too ! I want a little rousing. Put a pair into the wagonette, Freeman, and drive me down to Down Street. I'll give this horse a turn at once !"

Besides her establishment at The Den, Kate Mellon had a set of stables near Piccadilly, which were mainly devoted to the reception of new arrivals from the country, and as temporary resting-places for the horses required for Rotten-Row pupils. These stables were equally perfectly appointed with The Den ; and when the wagonette containing Kate and her head-groom drove in, she found a portion of her staff ready to receive her.

"What's this new Irish horse like, Tanner ?" said she to her town manager.

"A bad 'un, miss ; a rank bad 'un as ever stepped ! Good 'oss, fine-made 'oss ! jump any think ; good slopin' shoulders, and henormous quarters ; but the temper of—savin' your presence—the devil ! He pinned one of the men when he was a-dressin' him this morning, and his hi rolls fearful ;" and Mr. Tanner, who, though a thorough horseman, was an undeniable Cockney, led the way towards the loose box where the new arrival was standing. "They calls 'im Balthazar," said he ; "and if that means a out-an'-out bad 'un, they're right."

They found him in a loose box at the end of the yard, a big brown-black horse, sixteen and a half, six off, with a long lean head, deep neck, round barrel, deep chest, low back, short forehand, big broad foot. As the door of the box opened he turned his eye round, showing an inflamed white, put back his ears, and lashed out savagely.

"Hold on, mon !" said old Freeman ; "steady, boy ; let's look at thee ;" and the old man went fearlessly up to the horse's head, and placing his hand in the head-collar, commenced turning him about.

"Send one of your men for my saddle, Tanner, and put No. 3 bridle on him. Is No. 3 the one with the deep port? Yes, that's it," said she, touching it with her whip. "I'll just see what he's made of in the Row."

"Miss," said old Freeman, coming up close to her, and whispering, "better wait till t'see waät's made of oop in tan-ride at whoom—naästy brute, I'm thinkin' 't 'ill prove."

"Ah, never mind, Freeman; there's room in the Row to give him a very good bucketing. Bring him out."

He came out with a bound, and backed and reared and kicked when any one approached him, so that fully five minutes had elapsed before Kate, with all her readiness and agility, found herself on his back. Once mounted he started off at once, pelting over the uneven stones, and slipping about in a manner that made old Freeman hold up his hands and curse the Paving Commissioners, with even more than his usual energy.

Down one incline of Piccadilly and up the other went Balthazar, now and then trying his chance of a buck-jump, occasionally manifesting his inclination to rear. So through the Arch and into the Row. There Kate thought he might have his fling; there was no one within sight; and "to take it out" of a brute like this was a feat in which at one time she would have taken infinite pleasure; even now it promised some excitement. So quietly drawing the curb and simultaneously touching him with her heel, she felt the big brute give one tremendous plunge and snort, and then dart off like lightning. And now Kate's colour came again, and her heart leapt within her as she felt once more the ecstacy of tearing speed. Away he goes, easy as a chair when once he has settled into his stride, and with more real go in him than she has felt in any horse she has ridden for months. Bravo, Balthazar! Whoop, boy! get along! and the blue habit floats behind, and the gravel flies

round her, and she is going the real pace now, and no mistake! Who is this rider creeping out across her path from beneath the trees? Steady, boy, steady! by Jove, he's got the bit between his teeth, and there's no stopping him! Soho, soho, man! a shake—another; that's done it! the bit's free, and she pulls him up easily; and to her pulling him rides up a man, flushed, with working lips and scarlet face—Charles Beresford. She stares at him with starting eyes and compressed lips, through which comes the word “Charley!”

“It is you, you she-devil, is it?” said Beresford: “I thought it must be. This is fate that has sent you here to hear me curse you. I know what you've done, fast enough. You thought you could stab in secret, did you, you Jezabel? and without its being known where the blow came from! But I saw your infernal hand, and when I saw it, I cursed you as I curse you now!”

“Charley! Charley! oh, for God's sake; oh, if ever you cared for me—”

“Cared for you! I never did! I told you so—told you at least as plainly as a man could tell a woman; and then in sheer revenge—in dirty, low, mean revenge—you do this; but I'll be even with you. I'll—stand off, curse you! take your hand off, I say—”

She had laid her hand on his arm. He shook it off roughly, and in shaking it off raised his whip-hand spasmodically, and struck Balthazar sharply in the mouth. The Irish horse reared up on end straight as a dart, forced to his feet, plunged for an instant, and then started off in a mad gallop. Kate sat like a rock, pulling—pulling without the slightest effect. Then looking down she saw he had his eye turned back towards her, and held the bit in a firm grip between his teeth. This time the shake was no use; he would not loose his grip, and the bit was useless. They are nearing the end of the Row, and she remembers, shudderingly, the heavy iron gates, between which it would be impossible to steer him. If she could but turn him into the Drive, and so

head up towards the Serpentine bridge! A touch with her leg and a sharp tug at the rein; the Irish horse rises like a bird at the iron bars, but touches them with his fore-feet, and falls headlong into the Drive, rolling over on to his rider, who lies there crushed and motionless.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

“BE SURE YOUR SIN WILL FIND YOU OUT.”

WHEN Mr. Scadgers walked into the lobby of the Tin-Tax Office soon after noon on the day on which Mr. Beresford had announced to Mr. Simmel his intention of taking some decisive step in the Schröder business, he asked to be shown to Mr. Simmel. The abruptness and audacity of this demand struck dismay into the breasts of the attendant messengers; they could scarcely believe their ears. Mr. Scadgers was not unknown in the classic regions of Rutland House: in all the various departments of that grand governmental hive he drove a roaring trade; and though it was mostly carried on by correspondence, or through agents, yet he occasionally appeared in person on the scene, notably on Quarter-days, for the purpose of “bouncing” an instalment out of recalcitrant debtors. So, had he inquired for any of the junior clerks, or for any recognised black sheep of higher standing, he would have been quietly shown into the waiting-room apportioned for the reception of the public, and a light-heeled Mercury would have been torn from the perusal of the newspaper, and, with his tongue in his cheek, have been started off to summon the indebted one. But when Mr. Simmel’s name was mentioned, it was quite a different thing. The head messenger, who had never before attended to Mr. Scadgers, condescended to listen to what he had to say, at the same time deadening any hopes which might have been entertained with a chilling shoulder-shrug. “I’ll see, sir,” said he,—“I’ll see; but I think the Seckittary is partic’lar engaged just now: if you’ll take a seat, sir, I’ll let him have your name;

but—" "That's all; you tell him I'm here," said Mr. Scadgers, simply; "I'll stand the racket about his seeing me or not." The chief messenger shook his head as he walked slowly towards the secretarial apartment: he knew that no business in Mr. Scadgers' peculiar line could be on foot between that worthy and Mr. Simmel; for did not he, the chief messenger, take the Secretary's pass-book to the bank; did he not pay-in moneys, and get cash for his master's cheques; and was he not consequently aware that a very capital balance was always standing in Mr. Simmel's name? What could it be? The chief messenger's astonishment was increased when he received his orders to show the "party of the name of Scadgers" in at once to the secretarial presence; was at its height when, bidden to send for a cab, he saw the Secretary and Mr. Scadgers drive away together.

Arrived at Austin Friars, Mr. Simmel bade his companion wait in the outer office, while he himself was shown into the sanctum. He found Mr. Townshend somewhat aged and broken, but invested with all such relics of his former haughtiness as he could command. He received his visitor with studied cold politeness, pointed him to a chair, and waited for him to speak.

"I was sorry," began Simmel, "to be compelled to ask you to return home; but the fact is that the business was urgent, and I had no alternative. You comprehend?"

"I comprehend, sir," answered Mr. Townshend, "that the last time I saw you you proved yourself possessed of a secret, on the keeping of which depends my—almost my life! The possession of this secret enables you to dictate terms to me at your own convenience. Your convenience is now. You ordered me to come here to hear your terms, and I am here. Isn't that so?"

"You put matters a little harshly, Mr. Townshend; as, when you have heard what you are pleased to call my terms, I think you will allow. I do not come merely to dictate terms to you, as I at one time thought I should. There are wheels within wheels in my scheme; and I

must take off the front, and show you the whole scheme at work before you will be able to see the mechanism of it. The last time I had the pleasure of talking with you, you asked me what I wanted; I told you nothing. Since then I have made up my mind. I want justice!"

"Justice!" echoed the old man, turning deadly white; "justice!"

"Justice!" said Simnel; "not *on* any one though, merely *for* somebody. Pardon my again asking about that door. Nobody to listen, eh? All right! Last time I was here I had a notion in my head, which has since resolved itself into a certainty, and into the pivot on which all my action turns. I must bore you with old memories once more, I'm afraid. You recollect that, while you were at Combeardingham with our old friends Pigott and Wells, you formed an acquaintance with a very pretty girl—a 'hand' in one of the factories? You shake your head, eh? it *is* a long time since, and these sort of things get pushed from one's mind by other affairs, and—however, I think you'll recollect her when I mention her name. Does the name Ann Moore convey to you—Ah! I thought so! I'll wait a minute, if you please; there's no hurry."

"Go on, sir; go on!" said Mr. Townshend, whose face was hidden in, and supported by, his hands.

"An attachment sprung up between you and Ann Moore, I think, which was the cause of great distress to her only relation, a brother, with whom she lived. This brother and you exchanged words—if not blows—on this subject, and the result was that the girl left her brother and went to live with you. Did you speak?"

If he had spoken, he did not repeat what he had said, but sat there still and silent.

"She had been living with you for about a year when that unfortunate affair of the acceptance happened. You were obliged to leave Combeardingham; but you were not obliged, so far as I can make out, to leave it as you did—without giving her the least notion of your intention; without leaving her one shilling to support herself or

your little child! She could not go back to the factory; she had not been there since the child's birth; and she was weak and ill, and unable to do the work. So she and the child starved."

"Great God!" cried the old man, looking up in horror—"starved?"

"Well—for all you had to do with it! You're just as much a murderer as if they actually had perished of want, leaving them as you did! But they didn't. Neighbours found them out only just in time; found out her brother; and he, when he found you'd gone off, came round and took his sister to his heart again. He was a printer just starting for himself, and he took his sister—she'd always been his favourite—to his new home; and there she died three weeks after her arrival."

"Died? Ann died? not of—"

"No, not of starvation, if you mean that; they said she died of a broken heart at having been deserted by the man she worshipped; but we know by medical science that that's an impossibility—don't we? At all events, she died; and then the printer, who was a rising man, looked after the little girl. He looked after her in an odd way. He had a foster-brother, who was a rider in a circus; and when the little girl was six years old, he placed her with the circus-people, where she remained until he started her in life on her own account."

"She lived, then?"

"Oh dear, yes; lived considerably; lives now and flourishes, and does extremely well. You have heard of a riding-mistress and horse-breaker, Miss Kate Mellon?"

"I have heard of such a person; and I have not heard—"

"Steady, please! Kate Mellon is Ann Moore's daughter. I need not point out her relationship to you. You shake your head. Proofs of course you want? I've taken the liberty of ringing the bell. Be good enough," added Mr. Simnel, to the clerk who appeared, "to tell that person who is waiting outside to step in. Do you recog-

nise him?" he asked of Mr. Townshend, as Scadgers entered the room.

Mr. Townshend, shading his eyes with his hand, looked long at the new-comer, and then said, "It is George Moore!"

"Right enough, sir," said Mr. Scadgers; "though it's many a long day since we met; and we're neither of us so young as then. Lord bless me! when I look at the Runner—we used to call him the 'Runner' because of Townshend of Bow Street, which was a nickname for him," added he, turning to Mr. Simmel,—“when I look at the Runner, and think how long it is since I left my mark on him about—”

"We won't trouble you for details," interrupted Mr. Simmel; "this gentleman acknowledges you as George Moore. Will you state whether you are the brother of Ann Moore, and if so, what became of her and her child?"

"Ann Moore was my sister," said Scadgers in a low voice, "as this man knows well enough. After he left the town suddenly and without giving her any notice, without leaving her any money, without—there, though it's so long ago, it makes me mad now when I think of it. When he left her starving and penniless, I took such care of her and the little one as best I could. Then—poor Ann died, and the child came to me. Young Phil Fox was my foster-brother; and he saw the little girl, and his wife took a sort of fancy to her, having none of their own. So I apprenticed her to old Fox, and she was with him for years, until I had got on in life and made some money; and then I thought I'd do what was right by the child, not letting myself be known in the matter, for I couldn't get over poor Ann's disgrace; and I fetched her away and had her put to business for herself."

"You didn't have her called by her mother's or her father's name, I believe?"

"No; her mother's name was shame to me; her father's would have been worse; so I called her Kate Mellon, after my mother's people; and by that name she's gone ever since."

"Thank you. You hear this testimony, Mr. Townshend; you—"

"I hear! I hear!" said the old man testily. "I hear what may possibly be a clever story arranged between two men for the purposes of extortion—"

The black cloud settled on Mr. Simmel's face; but before he could speak, Scadgers burst in: "Extortion! if I'd wanted any thing of you, Mr. George Townshend, shouldn't I have had it years ago? I've known where you've been and what money you've been making for the last eighteen years; and if I'd wanted any thing of you, I could have come down on you at any time. But I scorned it for me or for my sister's flesh and blood, just as I scorn it now! Extortion! why—"

"There! you're very naturally annoyed and excited, my good sir; but I think we shall bring Mr. Townshend to reason," said Mr. Simmel. "I don't think I need detain you any longer. I shall see you in a very short time, and, I hope, have some satisfactory news to communicate. Good-day!" and Mr. Simmel shook hands with Mr. Scadgers, who made a very curt bow to Mr. Townshend, and departed. Then Simmel turned to the old man, and said, "I make every allowance for your annoyance in this matter, Mr. Townshend; but you can no longer really doubt the truth of this statement."

"And suppose I admit it, sir; what then? To what end have you hunted up this story and—and the other, which you hold *in terrorem* over me? What views of yours am I to meet? What price am I to pay for past follies?"

"Follies is an easy word," said Simmel, with a grim smile; "but I don't think my proposition is a hard one. I am attached to Miss Moore—Kate Mellon—call her what you like—your daughter, I mean—honourably attached to her; but you, as a man of the world, will see that it would be impossible for me to marry a girl who is simply known for her eccentricity and her daring; who has no position in society—no relations—no any thing which the world demands, save money, and even of that she has not sufficient. You follow me?"

"Yes, sir, yes," said Mr. Townshend, who had again buried his face in his hands.

"Well, then, what I propose," said Simnel, who was getting annoyed at the old man's manner, "and what, moreover, I intend, by means of the hold which I have over you, to carry out, is this: you must acknowledge this young lady as your daughter; take her to your house, and let her live there for a month or two; let our wedding—a formal wedding, with all friends invited—take place from there; and you must give her ten thousand pounds."

"I refuse!" said Mr. Townshend; "I entirely refuse; I—"

"Oh, no, you don't," interrupted Mr. Simnel; "you'll think better of it. Why shouldn't you? You gave Mrs. Schröder, who didn't want it at all, twenty thousand; but you're not so well off just now, I know."

"How do you know that, you who are so well informed on all my affairs?"

"Well, I think I know pretty nearly every shilling you have out," said Simnel, rubbing his knee; "and Cotopaxis and Tierra del Fuegos have gone down like water lately. No; as matters stand, I'll be content with ten thousand."

"I did not so much mean about the money. I do not say that I would not pay the sum you name to be rid of the annoyance; but I will never undergo the humiliation of acknowledging that connexion."

"Better that than the humiliation of standing in the Old-Bailey dock! Better that than stone-quarrying at Portland at your time of life, sir, I can tell you, besides humiliation. Nonsense! It is not as if the acknowledging this daughter would hurt the prospects of the other. She has done with you now. If she marries again, it will be as Mr. Schröder's widow, without reference to you. Don't you understand?" ("He didn't like that allusion to Portland," said Simnel to himself. "I distinctly heard his teeth chatter as I said the word.")

"And suppose I were to consent to this proposition.

sir," said the old man in a tremulous voice, "what guarantee have I that you might not come upon me at some future time for more money, or the gratification of some other wish; and that, on my refusal, you might not betray that horrible secret which you hold?"

"Now, my dear sir, there your usual sound common-sense has for once deserted you. Is it likely that, when once you are my father-in-law, I should proclaim a gentleman whose connexion with me I had taken so much pains to make public, as—pardon me—as a felon?"

Mr. Townshend cowered back in his chair, as Simnel, leaning forward to impart additional earnestness to his manner, uttered these last words. For a minute or two there was a dead silence; then the old man, with a terrible effort at collecting himself, asked, "When do you require an answer to this demand?"

"An answer? Immediately! I cannot conceive that there can be any question as to the answer to be returned. I am sure that you, my good sir, could not be mad enough to object to what is, under all the circumstances, really a very reasonable proposition. I merely want you to pass your word to agree to what I have placed before you, and we will then settle the time for carrying the arrangement into effect."

"What delay will you grant me?"

"Now, upon my word, Mr. Townshend," said Simnel, in a semi-offended tone, "this is scarcely polite. You ask for delay, as though you were ordered for execution, instead of having what might have been a very unpleasant affair settled in a thoroughly satisfactory manner."

"You must pardon me, sir," said Mr. Townshend; "I am an old man now. I am broken with illness; and this interview has been too much for me. Pray end it as speedily as possible." Indeed he looked as wan and haggard as a corpse.

"Poor devil!" thought Simnel, "I pity him thoroughly. But there must be no shrinking now, and no delay, or that Schröder-Beresford business may fall through; and then—" "I must get you to act at once,

then, Mr. Townshend, if you please," he said aloud. "Your daughter had better come to you at once, and we can then be married in a month or six weeks' time."

Mr. Townshend bowed his head. "As you please, sir; perhaps you will see me again to-morrow, or the day after. Just now I can settle nothing; my head is gone." And so the interview ended.

"I must keep him to it, by Jove!" soliloquised Mr. Simmel; "and pretty tight too, or it will fall through yet. He looked horribly ill, and he'll be going off the hooks without any recognition or any settlement, and then we should be neatly in the hole; for, of course, not one single soul would believe the story of Kitty's birth, though told by me and sworn to by Scadgers. And now I must let her know the whole truth, and ask for the reward. It's been a hard fight, and it isn't won yet."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

MINISTERING ANGELS.

A CROWD gathered round her in an instant. A nursery-maid, with her shrieking, frightened, inquisitive charges; a man who had been reading a book, and who still retained it open in his hand; a Life-guardsmen who, jantily striding along with a cane under his arm, had seen the horse jump and fall, and had him by the bridle so soon as he staggered to his feet, after rolling; a few vagrant boys, who came whooping from under the trees where they had been at play; and two old gentlemen, who had been silently pacing up and down together. Flecked with foam, covered with gravel, and bleeding at the knees and mouth, Balthazar stood trembling all over; and now and then looking down in wonder at his mistress who lay there, her head supported on a man's knee, her face deadly white, with one small thread of blood trickling down her forehead. The man on whose knee she lay passed his hand rapidly down her side and in the region of her heart. He was a park-keeper—a big brown-bearded man, whose decorated breast showed what deadly service he had seen—a stalwart giant with the heart of a child, for the tears were in his eyes, and his voice was any thing but steady as he looked up and said, "It beats yet!" It was to the guardsman he said it—the guardsman, who gave Balthazar's bit a wrench, and who muttered hearty curses on the horse for spoiling the beauty of such a comely lass.

"All your fault, you blunder-headed brute, it was! The lady sat him like a bird, but he got the bit between his teeth and came bolting down the Row; and when

she tried to turn him over the rails, he jumped short, the beast, and went slap on to his head. Yarr!" and he gave the horse another chuck in the mouth, and looked as if he would have liked nothing so well as to punish him on the spot.

As he spoke, a carriage drawn by a pair of horses came whirling down the Drive. It contained two ladies, one of whom, seeing the crowd, sat up, and pointed it out to her companion. Then they both looked eagerly out, and checked the coachman just as they reached the spot. By his mistress's orders the footman descended, inquired what had happened, and returned to the carriage to report. The next minute Alice Schröder, closely followed by Barbara Churchill, was kneeling by Kate Mellon's side.

What was it?—how had it happened?—who was the lady?—did any one know her?—had a doctor been sent for? These questions were asked in a breath, and almost as speedily answered. The story of the accident, so much of it at least as had been witnessed, was narrated. The park-keeper knew the lady by sight as a constant rider in the Row, always splendidly mounted, generally with other ladies, who, he thought, were pupils like; real ladies, the latter, and no doubt about it; for he thought he saw a glimmer of distrust in Barbara's eye; and this poor lady regularly like one of themselves. Poor lady! always so affable, giving "Good morning" to him and the other park-keepers—never knew her name, no; but no harm in her—one of the right sort, take his word for it. Had a doctor been sent for? Yes; two of the vagrant boys had been started off by the man with the book to fetch the nearest surgeon; but in the mean time several other persons had come up; among them a tall thin gentleman on an old white horse. This gentleman dismounted at once, quietly pushed his way through the crowd, knelt down by poor Kate Mellon's senseless body, and placed his finger on her pulse; then, looking up with a grave, thoughtful, professional smile into Mrs. Schröder's face, said:

"You are a friend of this lady's?"

"Only in my desire to serve her," said poor little Alice, who was the best-hearted little creature in the world, and who was bursting with philanthropy. "Why do you ask?"

"Simply that she must be moved to the nearest house as quietly and as quickly as possible. I am Dr. B.," continued the gentleman, naming a well-known physician; "but this is a surgeon's case, and should be seen by a surgeon at once. I fear St. George's is almost too far off."

"St. George's!" said Alice. "Oh, she must not go to an hospital; she—"

"My dear lady," said the old physician, "she could not go to any place so good; but it is a little far off."

"Then let her go to my house," said Alice. "I live close here—in Saxe-Coburg Square—just through Queen's Gate. Let us take her there at once, and—"

"My dear young lady," said Dr. B., "you scarcely know what trouble you are entailing on yourself. This poor girl is in a very bad way, I am sure, from the mere cursory examination I have been able to make. And—and, pardon me," he added, glancing at Alice's widow's-cap, "but you, surely, have seen enough trouble already for one so young."

"Will you be kind enough to superintend her being lifted into the carriage?" was all Alice said in reply. And the doctor bowed, and looked at her with a wonderfully benevolent expression out of his keen gray eyes.

Where had Barbara been during this colloquy? Where, but at the side of the prostrate figure, stanching the little stream of blood that welled slowly from the wound in the forehead, and bathing the deadly-cold brow and the limp hands with water that had been fetched from the neighbouring Serpentine. And then, at the doctor's suggestion, the park-keeper fetched a hurdle from the enclosure, and this they stretched across the seats of the carriage, and, covering it with shawls and cloaks and wraps, lifted on to it the prostrate form

of Kate Mellon, and with Alice and Barbara attendant on her, and the doctor riding close by, they drove slowly away.

Informed by the doctor that it would be dangerous to attempt to carry the patient upstairs, Mrs. Schröder had sent the footman on with instructions; and by the time they arrived at the house they found that a bed had been prepared in the library, a room on the ground floor, unused since Mr. Schröder's death. As they passed through Queen's Gate Dr. B. had cantered off, promising to return in a minute, and they had scarcely laid poor Kitty on the bed before he appeared, followed by a handsome bald-headed man, with a keen eye and a smile of singular sweetness, whom he introduced as Mr. Slade, the celebrated surgeon of St. Vitus's.

"I thought I recognised Slade's cab standing at a door in Prince's Terrace. He drives the most runaway horse in the most easily over-turned vehicle in London; but I suppose he thinks he can set his own neck when he breaks it, which he is safe to do sooner or later; so I rode round, and fortunately caught him just as he was coming out. And now I'll leave the case in his hands; it would be impossible to leave it in better." And so saying, Dr. B. bowed to the ladies, exchanged a laugh and a pinch of snuff with his brother-professional, and took his leave.

Mr. Slade then approached the bed, and made a rapid examination of the patient, the others watching him anxiously. His face revealed nothing, nor did he speak until he sent one of the servants for a small square box, which was, he said, in his carriage. While waiting for this, Alice took heart to speak to him, and ask him if the case was very serious.

"Very," was his quiet reply. "Could scarcely be worse."

"But there *is* hope?"

"There is always hope," said the old man, his face lighting up with his sweet grave smile; "but this is a very bad case. The poor girl's ribs are severely frac-

tured, and there is concussion here," pointing to the head, "which causes her insensibility. The box—thank you. Now, ladies, will you kindly leave the room, and I will join you presently."

When he came into the drawing-room, he said, "It is a compound fracture, and of a very bad kind. I fear she will never pull through; if she does, she must never dream of work again. I presume you ladies have been pupils of hers?"

"Pupils!" said Alice; "no, indeed; was she a governess?"

"We do not even know this poor lady's name," said Barbara; "we saw the accident, and Mrs. Schröder had her brought here at once."

"Mrs. Schröder is an angel of mercy," said Mr. Slade, with an old-fashioned bow. "This poor girl lying downstairs is Miss Mellon, a riding-mistress; a most correct and proper person, I've always heard, and one who had a great deal to do in breaking and training horses. I've often seen her in the Park; she rode splendidly; and I cannot conceive how this accident occurred."

"Do you think her senses will return—that she will be able to express any wishes—before—"

"I should think so," said Mr. Slade, not permitting Barbara to finish the sentence; "I think she will probably recover from the concussion, and then she will be sensible. It is the fracture I fear. I'll send a man to her place in Down Street, to let them know where she is, and I'll look round again this evening."

So there Kate Mellon lay helpless, senseless, motionless, watched over unconsciously by two women, one of whom she hated deeply, and by the other of whom she was held in the greatest detestation. There she lay through the dreary afternoon, through the long evening,—when Mr. Slade came again, bringing with him one of the hospital-nurses,—and through the dead solemn night. Very early the next morning, between seven and eight, Barbara, on her way from her bedroom to the

library, was surprised to see Mr. Slade enter the hall, and expressed her surprise.

"Well, it *is* early," said the kind-hearted surgeon; "but, my dear Mrs. Churchill, I've taken a great interest in this poor girl; and as I always take a constitutional round the Park before breakfast, I thought I'd just run across and see her.—Well, nurse, what news? None, eh? Just raise that curtain the least bit—that'll do. Hm! she'll get rid of the concussion; but—hm! well, well, not our will, but Thine; hm, hm! Any body come after her yesterday?"

"An old bailiff or stud-groom," said Barbara, "came down in the evening, and entreated to be allowed to see his mistress. I told him that was impossible, and explained the state of things to him myself. Poor fellow, he was dreadfully overcome, the tears rolled down his cheeks, and he bemoaned his mistress's fate most bitterly."

"Hm! right not to let him see her then; could have done no good. But she'll probably come to her senses during the day, and then, if she asks to see any body—well, send for them. The refusal might irritate her, and—and it can make very little difference."

"You think then she is—in danger?" asked Barbara.

"My dear young lady," said he, taking her hand, "in the greatest danger. If inflammation of the lungs sets in, as I much fear it will, nothing can save her.—Nurse, I'll write a prescription for a cordial. If she speaks, and sends for any one, give it to her just before they come. It will revive her for a time."

About mid-day, when Alice had gone out for a little air, and Barbara was left alone with the nurse and the patient, there came a groan from the bed, and running up together, they found Kate with her eyes open, staring vaguely before her. After a few minutes she spoke, in a hoarse strange voice.

"What's this?" she said. "Have I missed my tip at the ribbons and had a spill? Lord, how old Fox will give it me! A-h, my side! This must have been a bad cropper, eh? Hollo! I was fancying I was at the old

circus again. Where am I? who are you? what has happened?"

"You are with friends," said Barbara, kneeling by the bed; "you have had an accident, and—"

"Ah, now I recollect! the Irish horse bolted and blundered at the rails! How long ago was it?"

"Yesterday, about this time."

"And I was brought here—to your house! What a kind voice you've got! and I'm bad, eh? I know I must be bad from the pain I'm in; my side hurts me most awful. Has the doctor seen me? what doctor?"

"Mr. Slade: you've heard of him?"

"Oh, yes, seen him often; drives a rat-tailed bay in a D'Orsay cab; goes the pace; often wondered he didn't break his neck. What does he—oh! my side!" She groaned deeply, and while groaning seemed to drop off into a heavy stertorous slumber.

When she roused again Mr. Slade was standing over her holding her pulse. "Well," he asked in a gentle voice, "you know me? Ah, of course you do! I've seen you taking stock of my old rattletrap, as you've spun by me, and laughing at my nag. Pain still? kind of pressure, eh? Yes, yes, my poor lass, I know what you mean; so dreadfully weak too; yes, yes. What, danger? Well, my dear, there's always danger in these cases; and one never knows. Not afraid? no, my brave girl, I know your courage; but—well, there's no harm in settling any little matters which—eh? if in God's will we come all right, there's no harm done, and—yes, yes; rest now a bit; I'll see you again to-night." And Mr. Slade hurried into his carriage, blowing his nose very loudly indeed with his red-silk pocket-handkerchief, and with two large tears on his spectacle-glasses.

When the door had shut behind him, Kate called the nurse in a feeble voice, and bade her send for the lady to whom she had previously spoken. In answer to this call, Barbara was speedily by the bedside.

"You—you don't mind my sending for you; do you, dear?" asked Kate, in a low tremulous voice.

"Mind, my poor child,—mind! of course not. What is it, dear?"

"I want you to—do you mind giving me your hand? I can't reach it myself—so, dear; thank you. I want you to do something for me. I—I'm dying, dear—oh, don't shrink from me—I know it; he tried to hide it from me, that kind old man, and bless him for it! but I saw how he looked at the nurse, and I heard her whispering to him behind the screen. I don't fear it, dear. I know—well, never mind! I want to see two people before I go; and I want you to send for them, and let them come here, and let me talk to them—will you, dear?"

"Why, of course, of course," said Barbara, the tears streaming down her cheeks; "but you mustn't talk in this way,—you mustn't give way so—no one can tell how this will turn out."

"I can," said Kate quietly. "I seemed to know it when I heard the click of that horse's shoes against the iron railing. It all rose before me in an instant, and I knew I was a dead woman. You can't conceive—I haven't said much—but you can't conceive what torture I'm going through with my side. It burns and burns, and presses—there! I won't say any more about it. Now, dear, will you put down the names of the people who are to be sent to?"

"I shall recollect them; tell me now."

"Well, Mr. Simnel, Tin-Tax Office, Rutland House—"

"Yes; and—"

"And Frank Churchill, Esq.—oh, how your grasp tightens on my hand! Frank Churchill, Esq., *Statesman* newspaper-office—in the City somewhere—they'll find it. What is the matter, dear? You heard me?"

"Yes," said Barbara faintly; "they shall be sent for at once."

"At last," said she to herself, when she had regained her own room, after despatching the messenger—"at last I shall be enabled to fathom this horrible mystery, and to show those who have doubted, that I was not wrong,

after all, in taking the decisive step which I did. If this wretched creature prove to be—as I suppose she will—Frank's correspondent both at Bissett and at home; if—and yet Mr. Slade said he believed her to be a perfectly correct and proper person, else he would not have permitted her to be received here. Mr. Slade's belief—what is that worth? Is it possible that—no! Here is a woman, poor creature, believing herself to be on her deathbed, and sending for my husband,—a woman of whose existence I have never heard, who is obviously not a person of society, and yet who—great Heavens, if it be proved!—if the worst that I have dared to imagine be proved! And yet lately I have felt that that is impossible, in thinking over Frank's character and ways of life, in thinking over all he has said of dishonour and deception, I have felt certain that—and yet here is this woman sending for him, not to his private house,—‘*Statesman* office, somewhere in the City—they'll find it.’ *Statesman* office! That's where the first letter was addressed, and re-directed to Bissett; and the second letter,—the envelope, I mean,—now I think of it, was sent to the same place. It *must* be the same. And yet how sweet, and patient, and resigned she is! how quiet and calm, and—Frank Churchill, Esq.—no mistake in both the names! Who is the other man, I wonder? Frank Churchill! what an extraordinary fate has planned this for us! I'll see their interview, and hear all that she has to say; and then if—of course it can't be otherwise—what other solution can there be? If Frank has intrigued with this—and she going to die too; lying there at the point of death, and looking up into my face with so much gratitude and affection—oh, Heaven direct me! I'm at my wits'-end!” and Barbara threw herself on her bed and wept bitterly.

The short dim twilight had faded into dusk before the cab containing the messenger and the two gentlemen whom he had been sent to fetch arrived at the house. They were ushered at once into the dining-room, where they were received by Pilkington the butler, who pro-

duced refreshment. That being declined, they were shown into the library. In the middle of the room stood the bed in deep shadow; across the far end of the room stood a large folding screen, almost hidden by which was a woman with her back to them, bending over a table and apparently engaged in compounding some medicine or drink. A shaded lamp placed on a table between the bed and the screen shed a dim light throughout the room. As the door opened, Mr. Simnel entered first, with a faltering step, strode swiftly to the bedside, and then dropped on to his knees, burying his face in his hands. Kate moved her arm with great difficulty until her hand rested on his head, and then she said, half trustingly, half reproachfully, "Robert!" There was no spoken reply, but the man's big strong frame heaved up and down convulsively, and the tears came rushing thick as rain through his closed fingers.

"Robert, my poor fellow! you must not give way so; you'll break me down. I hadn't a notion you—and yet how faithfully you've served! I saw it, Robert; I knew it long ago, when—ah, well, all over now; all over now, Robert, eh?—What, Guardy, you here too! That's well. Ah, I feel so much more composed now I see your dear solemn old face. You came at once."

"Came at once, my poor child—my poor dear child—" and Churchill's voice failed him and he stopped.

"Now, Guardy, come! You won't have much more trouble with your bothering charge, and you must be steady now. It gives me fresh courage, I declare, to hear your solemn voice and to know that you're at my very side for all sorts of serious advice.—Now, Robert, you know that I'm in a bad way; that I'm going to—no, no, be a man, Robert; you'll upset me, if you give way so,—Guardy, this gentleman, Mr. Simnel, has been very, very kind to me for a long, long time. He wanted to marry me, Guardy; and wanted me to have a proper place as his wife, and so he's been hunting up all about my friends and my birth and that, and he's found out a lot. But he doesn't know about you, Guardy; and as I

wanted to tell him about that, and to settle one other thing, I sent for you both to-night. The—the medicine!—ask nurse—I'm a little faint!"

Both men rose; but Simnel was nearest, and it was into his hand that the woman behind the screen placed the glass. When Kate had swallowed the cordial, she said, in firmer tones:

"I told you, Robert, that when I left old Fox's circus I was fetched away by two gentlemen, an old fellow and another. This is the other. When we got to the hotel that night, the old man said to me, 'Never you mind who I am, my lass; you won't see me any more after I've once started you in town; but you will see this gentleman, and you'll have to send to him whenever you want advice or any thing else. He's your guardian,' he said, 'and he'll look after you.' I recollect I laughed, and said he looked very young, and giggled out some girl's nonsense; but he—I can see you now, Guardy!—put his hand on my head and told me he was much older than I, and that he'd had plenty of experience to teach him the ways of the world. I've never seen the old man since; but, oh, how often I've sent for Guardy! I've worried him day and night, written to him whenever I wanted to know any thing: how to treat swells who wouldn't pay, or who were getting troublesome in other ways; when I wanted the landlord seen, or fresh land bought; when—good Lord! when I lost heart over—something—and thought of giving the place up, and selling off and going away, he's kept me as straight as a die; he's never shown the least ill-temper with all my worryings and fidgettings; he's always shown me what to do for the best—and has been my kindest and least selfish and best friend."

"You say too much, Kate," said Churchill; "any thing I have done you have repaid long since by your good sense and docility."

"You could never be repaid, sir, I see plainly enough," said Simnel; "there are few men who would have so acquitted themselves of such a charge, and I shall ever

honour and esteem you for it. But may I ask how you came to be known to the other person of this story, who from some knowledge I guess to be Scadgers the bill-discounter?"

"It is easily explained. When I arrived in London from Germany, and determined to make my bread by literature, I wrote where I could, and for what I could get. Some article of mine was seen by Mr. Scadgers, who then owned, amongst other lucrative speculations, a weekly newspaper and a cheap periodical. Pleased with what he had read—or had recommended to him more likely—he sent for me, and after a little discussion, made me editor and manager of both his literary speculations. He paid liberally, and seemed pleased with all I did; then wanted me to undertake the management of others of his affairs, which I declined. But one night in his office he told me the story of this girl—incidentally, as a suggestion for a tale for the paper, I believe; and so interested me that I suggested his removing her from the life she was then leading, and giving her a chance of doing something for herself. After some discussion he agreed, on the understanding that he should never appear in the matter; but that if he provided the necessary funds, I would manage the whole business and undertake a kind of guardianship of the girl. I hesitated, until I saw her at the circus; then, being somewhat of a physiognomist, and thinking I saw in her face promise of what was wanted—honesty, endurance, and a power of keeping straight in front of adverse circumstances—I consented. The rest you know."

"Will you take my hand, Mr. Churchill?" said Simmel in a low voice; "God Almighty bless you for—for your kindness and your trust!"

"That's right!" said Kate, on whom the action had not passed unobserved—"shake hands, you two, good fellows both of you! And now look here—but one word! I didn't catch all you said, Guardy, but you and Robert seem to have made it all right. And now I want to tell you about something—about—when I'm gone, you know

—oh, you silly fellow, Robert, how can I speak if you go on so!—I've put away some money, you know; and I want you to have it, Guardy. You're married, some one told me; and you'll want all that; and you won't despise it, eh? You know it's all honestly come by, and you've seen how it's been made—my accounts, you know, you used to say they were very decently kept; and there'll be no shame in taking it—your wife, I mean, and that sort of thing; you can tell her about it. I wonder what she's like. I should have liked to have seen her, Guardy, though perhaps she wouldn't have cared for such as I. Oh, poor old Freeman and the men at The Den—let them have a year's wages; I've put it all regular in a will which I made last year; you'll find it in the desk; and sell the stud—high prices, most of them. I—my side's awful now; don't go yet; let me have a little—just a little rest. I'm faint, and in such—such dreadful pain!”

She fell back exhausted. Simmel still knelt by the bedside convulsed with grief; but Frank Churchill looked round the screen to summon the nurse. No one was there, so he went to the door and called softly. The nurse responded at once and passed by him; but as he turned back he saw the butler, who beckoned to him.

“Will you please to step this way, sir?” said the man; “you're wanted in the dining-room.”

Churchill followed him; and as the dining-room door shut behind him, found himself face to face with his wife.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

UNDER PRESSURE.

THE dulness of the autumnal season causing a heavy depression every where, by no means relaxed its maleficent influence in room No. 120 of the Tin-Tax Office. The gentlemen therein located had each, as has every man in the world, his own private griefs, anxieties, and worries; and these never blossomed into such full vigour as in the autumn. In the first place, there was no more leave of absence to look forward to, which was, in itself, a dreadful thing; and then there was looming in the future the approach of Christmas, a dread season which each of the different denizens of No. 120, for different reasons, regarded with dismay. To kind genial Mr. Kinchenton the coming Christmas was specially fearful; for after a long struggle between inclination and duty, a struggle resulting in the victory of the latter, he had decided upon sending his boy Percy, the apple of his eye, to school after the Christmas holidays; and in the shadow of that coming event he was sitting moping and melancholy. Mr. Dibb was always bad in the autumn; his liver, always rebellious, was thoroughly intractable at that season known as the "fall of the leaf," and remained perfectly quiet, declining to perform any one of the functions intrusted to it, and calmly spurning any attempt to call it into action. So Mr. Dibb's complexion grew more and more like that of the cover of a well-worn school-copy of Ainsworth's Dictionary; and Mr. Dibb's temper became so cranky, that Mr. Crump, the extra-clerk, lived in a perfect cyclone of torn-up letters and accounts to "do over again;" so that said Crump be-

moaned his hard fate, and expressed himself as perfectly certain that he should have an earlier attack of chilblains than usual that year. Mr. Boppy too had his private grief, in the shape of a visitor at his establishment, Mrs. Boppy's mamma, a lady of vast size from the manufacturing districts, who had arrived on a month's visit, had monopolised the best portion of Mr. Boppy's house, and who demanded to have life shown to her. So Mrs. Boppy had instructed Mr. Boppy to convey her and her mamma to the Thames Tunnel, the top of the Monument, the Crypt of St. Paul's, to the Tower, to Madame Tussaud's wax-work, and other exhibitions much sought after by country people, but seldom visited by Londoners; and had moreover stimulated her husband to ask for various half-holidays, which Mr. Kinchenton would readily have granted, but which were never obtained without a hand-to-hand combat with Mr. Dibb. "Very well, Mr. Kinchenton," he would say, "Mr. Boppy must go, sir, if you say so, of course. You're the head of this room, I believe; though how the work's to be got through with Mr. Prescott absent on leave, Mr. Crump next to useless, and Mr. Pringle, who always takes three-quarters of an hour to his lunch—"

"What's that you're saying about me, Mr. Dibb?" Mr. Pringle would ask from over the top of his desk.

"Says you take three-quarters of an hour for your lunch," would repeat the revengeful Boppy.

"All right! better do that than make yourself a wretched hypochondriac, like some people. Let digestion wait on appetite, and health on both, Boppy! Mr. Dibb's got none of the three; doesn't know what any of them mean; so we must excuse him." And then Mr. Boppy would get his leave, and go away and do dismal duty with his relatives.

Nor was Mr. Pringle in any thing like his usual flow of spirits. He was very mercurial, tremendously affected by the weather; and black skies, cold winds, and empty streets sent him down to zero. Moreover his other-half, his chum, his bosom-friend, Mr. Prescott, was away on

leave, paying his long-promised visit to old Mr. Murray of Brooklands; and so Mr. Pringle was left to himself, and sat in his chambers smoking solitary pipes, and learning whole pages of the Comic Song-Book, and perpetually falling asleep over the first page of the first volume of Boswell's *Life of Johnson*. For Mr. Kinchen-ton, who took great interest in honest George, had told him that no man was worth any thing unless he read something besides trashy novels and Little Warblers; and Mr. Pringle, determining to "go-in for something heavy," had selected the life of Dr. Johnson, whose *Rasselas* he had read as a child, remembering it as "the adventures of a young cove and an old cove, with a doosid good bit about a bridge, or something, in it." Moreover George Pringle was by no means comfortable as to the state of his friend's money-matters. He had himself "ignored," as he phrased it, all his own transactions with Scadgers; but he was in with Prescottt on one bill, and he knew that his friend had involved himself with several other pieces of stamped paper in the hands of the same worthy. And George had a strange notion that some of these were overdue; and knowing that the Long Vacation was rapidly drawing to a close, and that Term-time was coming on, he feared that the mighty engines of the law might be set to work, and come a general smash. He had written to Prescottt about it; but had only received a couple of lines in reply, to say that he was very jolly, and that the things would be all right; so that all he could do was patiently to await his friend's return to town.

That happened one night, when Pringle and Boswell had had a severe disagreement, and Pringle had let Boswell drop into the fender, and had gone to sleep with his pipe in the corner of his mouth. There came a heavy bang at the oak, and Pringle, starting up and opening it, found himself face to face with James Prescottt,—rosy, stout, jolly, and beaming, with a big portmanteau in his hand.

"Hallo ! old man !"

"Hallo! old man! been asleep, eh? lazy old beggar! wanted me to rouse you up! give us a hand to the port-manteau, George, and help him in! that's it! Well," taking off his coat and making a dive at his friend, and catching him by the shoulders, and peering inquiringly into his face, "and how goes it? what's the news? how are all the buffers at the shop? any body dead? any body got the sack? no promotion? always our luck!"

"Things are much the same, I think; no news any where; they'll be glad to see you back, for they've been grumbling about the work—not that you'll be much help at that, though. And what have you been doing? had a good time?"

"Good time? stunning!" and Mr. Prescott kissed his fingers and waved them in the air. "Never put in such a time in my life. Old boy was splendacious, did every mortal thing one wanted,—good nag to ride, good shooting, capital cellar, let you smoke where you like—no end! My old governor was there too, as happy as a bird!"

"And the young lady—Miss Murray?"

"Oh, Emily! oh, I can't tell you how good that has turned out! She's out and away nicer than any thing that ever was; no nonsense about her; quiet, ladylike, sweet, affectionate little thing! You know, George, there are some women—"

"Yes," interrupted Mr. Pringle—"I know there are! and there are some men who want a glass of grog—and I'm one; and there are others who are mad spoony—and you're another! I'll mix for you, and we'll light our pipes, and then I shall be in a better frame of mind to listen to your dilation on Miss Murray's excellences."

Mr. Prescott, so soon as their glasses were before them, their pipes in their mouths, and they were established one on either side of the fireplace, lost no time in availing himself of his friend's permission, and plunged into those amatory raptures which we have all of us suffered under at our friends' hands. The singular difference of the young lady to, and her superiority over, every

one else, the mixture of sense and sensibility which she displayed, the clever things she said and did, her delicacy, firmness, bashfulness, presence of mind,—all these were dilated on at full length by one gentleman, and listened to with becoming patience by the other. At last, when his friend fairly stopped for want of breath, Mr. Pringle asked,

“And have you put it all right, Jim? of course you’re not carrying on this kind of thing without meaning it; have you squared it with them all?”

“Well, Emily and I understand each other thoroughly; and it’s all arranged between us, I think. I mean that I haven’t said any thing, you know; but people don’t say any thing now in such cases. There’s a kind of a—a—”

“Yes,” interrupted Pringle—“yes; I suppose there is. But what about her father?”

“I haven’t spoken to the old boy yet. Not that I think he’d make much objection, turn rusty, or any thing of that sort, for he’s tremendously kind and jolly; but I don’t like to talk to him while I’ve got these infernal debts hanging over me. I don’t think it’s fair; and yet—Have you heard any thing from old Scadgers, George?”

“No, I haven’t heard any thing; but—Never mind, we’ll talk about him to-morrow, when you’ve had a rest, and we’re both clearer and cooler than we are now. Now turn in and get a sleep, old man; good-night!”

The next morning, however, when Mr. Pringle introduced the subject of Mr. Scadgers and the acceptances which he held, Mr. Prescott showed a remarkable alacrity in changing the conversation, an alacrity which he exhibited on two or three subsequent occasions. He was in the habit, Pringle observed, of receiving every morning with the greatest regularity a pink-coloured note with a country postmark, and after reading its contents he became very much absorbed, slightly ethereal, and generally indisposed to converse on mundane matters. But honest George Pringle, who had no such pleasant distractions, knew perfectly well that time was running

on, and that some positive step must be taken; so on the fourth morning after his friend's return he tackled him resolutely.

"I say, Jim, about those bills? No good fencing about the business any longer; we *must* go into it, or we shall come to grief. I've a notion that some of them are overdue already, and I wonder Scadgers hasn't been here pressing for either a settlement or a renewal."

"To tell you the truth, George, I'm in a funk about them myself. I saw a very suspicious-looking Jew outside the office as I came in this morning,—a fellow in rusty black, with a blazing nose; and when he came towards me my heart jumped into my mouth. However, he only asked me which was Mr. Beresford's office—"

"Mr. Beresford's?"

"Yes, our swell Commissioner, you know; so I got off easy."

"What's the entire figure that you're liable for—including mine, and all the rest of them, I mean?"

"The entire figure? well, it can't be far off a couple of hundred. I had to spend such a lot when Emily was in town; pit-stalls whenever she went to the Opera, to be near her, and hire of horses, and my share of two or three Greenwich dinners, and all that, walked into no end of tin. I don't know where the dence I'm to get it, and that's the fact."

"Do you owe any thing else? tailors or boot-makers, or any fellows of that sort?"

"Not a sixpence! I cleared what little bills I had of that kind with part of old Scadgers' money. And since I got that rise here last month, I could go on as straight as possible on what I get. But it's the infernal mill-stone of a back debt round my neck. I don't know what to do! I can't go and ask the dear old governor to advance; he's got quite enough to do with his income, and he'd be awfully knocked over to hear I was in for such a lot."

"Of course you can't. Now, look here; I'll tell you what you must do. You must first pledge your word to

me and to yourself—not that any thing can be raised upon it, but it's the right thing to do—that you won't borrow another sixpence. And then you must go to old Scadgers and tell him that you're in a fix; that you can't pay him in a lump: but that you'll let him have so much every quarter of the principal, and pay decent interest until it's cleared off. You must draw-in your horns a little, and live quietly on the remainder. I'll go security for you to old Scadgers."

"You're a trump, George; but do you think he'll do it?"

"Do it? he must. He makes far too good an income out of the fellows in this place and other government-offices to have any public row made about him and his goings-on. If it got blown, they'd have a leader on him in the *Scourge* that would take the skin off his old back, and, worse than that, stop his business entirely. No, no; he'll do it fast enough. But we must go to him in a regular business manner. Now what are the dates and amounts of these different things?"

"I've got a memorandum of them in my desk, that I made at the time. I'll get it out. Hallo!" said Prescott, opening his desk, and taking therefrom a sealed letter; "what's this?" holding it up.

"Oh, by Jove, I forgot to tell you! that came while you were away, and I put it in your desk, thinking to name it to you directly you returned. Nothing particular, I hope?"

"I don't know; it's very thick, and I don't know the hand. It cannot be a writ, eh?" and Prescott turned very pale.

"Writ, nonsense! they don't send writs by post. Don't you know the handwriting? it's not round enough for a lawyer's. Open it, man; open it at once!"

And so, wanting to know the contents of the letter, they actually thought of opening it.

As Prescott opened the envelope he drew from it a thick roll of papers, and unfolding them, looked at them with wonder. Pringle, looking over his shoulder, started; and, taking them from his friend's hand, exclaimed,

"Bills, by Jove! cancelled bills! look here, the signature torn off and hanging. The very bills you gave to Scadgers; mine, Compter's, your I O U, and the lot! You've been chaffing me, Jim—getting a rise out of me all this time, eh?"

"What do you mean by getting a rise? I'm as innocent in this matter as yourself."

"But do you mean to say that you didn't pay them?"

"I mean to say that I've never paid Scadgers one individual sixpence!"

"Then I mean to say that you're a devilish lucky fellow; for somebody else has."

"Are these bills paid, then?"

"Oh, don't be so preposterously green, Jim. *Are* the bills paid? Of course they are! paid and returned to you to put in the fire, or do what you like with; you can never be called on for another penny. Well, you're a lucky fellow. No one ever paid any thing for me. Who the deuce can have done this for you?"

"I haven't the remotest idea. It couldn't be Scadgers himself?"

"N—no!" said Mr. Pringle, grinning from ear to ear.

"No, I don't think it was Scadgers; he's not entirely in that line. Who is there that knew you were in a fix?"

"No one, not a soul but yourself, and—"

"No, old fellow; I've not paid them, I'll take my oath. Should have been delighted to help you, but hadn't the wherewith."

"Then I'm done. I haven't a notion who can have helped me."

"Well, it doesn't matter, so long as it's done. You're in luck's way, my boy. All this horrible excitement and doubt brought to an end, and you free as air. I say, how about the keeping quiet and not launching into any extra expense, now? Will you hold to it?"

"I'll swear I will. And, what's more, now I am free, I'll strike while the iron's hot. To-day's Friday; to-morrow a half-holiday. I'll go down to Brooklands by the 2.40 train."

"I think you're right, Jim," said Pringle, quietly. "You've had your fling, and you seem to have a chance of settling well in life just now. Tell the old father all about yourself,—your income and your chances, I mean,—and don't give him the opportunity of flinging any thing in your teeth hereafter. Well, whoever paid that amount of stuff for you did you a good turn, and no mistake. I wonder who it could be. No use asking Scadgers, he'd be as close as death about it; indeed, if there were any hanky-panky, any mystery, I mean, he'd always swear he was out whenever one called, for fear it should be bullied out of him."

Indeed, Mr. Pringle, not being of a very impulsive temperament, and not having very much to think about, bestowed far more wonderment on the question as to who could have been Mr. Prescott's anonymous benefactor than did Mr. Prescott himself. That gentleman, in love over head and ears, simply thought of the transaction as a means to an end; in any other position he would have bestowed upon it a certain amount of astonishment, but now all he cared for was to avail himself of the chance it had opened up to him. He had determined that, so soon as he found himself unfettered by debt, he would inform Mr. Murray of his attachment to his daughter, and ask the old gentleman's consent to their getting married. He knew well enough that his own official salary was by no means sufficient to maintain a wife—notably a wife, the daughter of a rich country squire—in the manner to which she had been accustomed; but he knew equally well that the rich country squire would, in all probability, make a handsome settlement on his daughter; and to this he thoroughly looked forward. Not that there should be urged against him the least suspicion of an *arrière pensée*; he loved the girl with all his heart and soul and strength; but as in these days he would never have thought of riding forth into Fleet Street and proclaiming her beauty and virtue, and challenging all who might feel inclined to gainsay them to single combat,—in like manner, in these days would

he never have thought of marrying a woman without money. And this was the youth who would have taken Kate Mellon in her unrecognised position, and, so far as he knew, penniless! Yes, but Kate Mellon was his first love; those were his earliest salad days; he has had much experience of the world since then, and is not honester or fresher from the contest.

There was, however, no doubt about his love for Miss Murray and his desire to see her, so he started off by the first train after business-hours on the next day, and was whirled off to Havering Station. One may suppose that he had found time to communicate the fact of his intended arrival; for he had scarcely proceeded a few paces up the steep hill which leads from the railway to the village before he saw coming spinning towards him a low basket-chaise drawn by a pair of roan galloways in plain black harness. And seated in the basket, driving the roans, was a young lady in the prettiest little round hat, and with the nicest short sealskin jacket and the daintiest dogskin driving-gauntlets, who gave the knowingest salute with her whip when she saw Prescott, while the groom behind her jumped down and relieved the young gentleman of his portmanteau.

"Punctual, sir, I think!" was the young lady's salutation after she had rescued the right-hand dogskin gauntlet from a prolonged pressure—"punctual, I think! I say, James, what on earth has brought you down again so quickly? You didn't give a hint in your note."

"You, of course," said Mr. Prescott, looking at her with the greatest delight.

"No, but really! Papa, when he read your note, said he was delighted to have you again, and that he supposed you must have obtained some further leave of absence. But I knew that was not likely, and I felt certain you were coming on some special business. Oh, James, there's no bad news, is there?"

"No, my darling pet, no bad news,—good, splendid, excellent news! I'd tell you what it is now, but I can't, because it's news that's impossible to be told except with

action; and if I were to take action, I should astonish the worthy person who is sitting behind us, and who is taking such care of my portmanteau."

"Oh, James, how can you! You'll drive, of course. I can't fancy any thing more horrible than seeing a gentleman driven by a lady. Now, Bagshaw, all right. And so you won't tell me, James?"

"Not yet, Emily, not yet; and yet I don't see why on earth I shouldn't. Bagshaw seems to be paying the greatest attention to the landscape, and, moreover, has established a wall of portmanteau between us and him of the most satisfactory kind. So I don't mind telling you, that I have come down to propose for you to your father, and to ask his consent to our marriage."

"Oh, James, I never did! And ask papa's consent, indeed! Do you know that you've never asked mine, sir?"

"Haven't I? Well, then, darling, I'll ask it now. No, no! what nonsense! Bagshaw can't see under the rug, and I can hold the ponies perfectly with one hand: give it me! So; and now about papa; what do you think? what do you advise?"

"I—I think he won't make any fuss, James; he's always full of your praises, and he's not like those horrid fathers in books, who never will let their daughters marry the people they love—I didn't mean to say that—I meant the people who love them! But I think I'd speak to him after dinner."

"After dinner?"

"Yes, you know, when you're left alone together. He's pleasanter then, I think. And then you can come to me in the drawing-room and tell me all about it."

Mr. Murray received James Prescott with the greatest cordiality; and when dinner was over, and the cloth was removed, the old gentleman instructed Banks the butler to bring up a bottle of the '20 and some devilled biscuits. Banks, an old and faithful retainer, muttered something in his master's ear as to what Dr. Harwood had said; on which his master told him to go to the devil, and mind his

own business. So the '20 was brought; and Miss Murray had half a glass, and then retired to the drawing-room; and Mr. Murray bade his guest pull his chair round to the fire and prepare for serious drinking.

Then James Prescott knew that the crisis of his fate was approaching, so he filled a bumper of port, drank half of it, looked the old gentleman steadily in the face, and said, "I wanted to speak to you, sir."

"All right!" said the old gentleman, helping himself; "speak on."

"About your daughter, Miss Murray, sir," said Prescott, beginning to feel himself all aglow,— "about Miss Murray, sir."

"All right!" said the old gentleman, with perfect calmness—"what about her?"

"Well, sir—I—the truth is—that I—I've formed an attachment to her, sir—she's—she's a most delightful girl, sir," said Prescott, falling into hopeless bathos at once.

"She is, James," said the old gentleman,—like the sphynx, 'staring straight on with calm eternal eyes,'— "she is."

"She is, indeed, sir. I believe I may say that Miss Murray is aware of my entertaining this notion, sir—and that—that she's not displeased at it."

"Of course not, of course not, James; what girl would be displeased at the notion that a young fellow found her delightful?"

"Confound it! he won't give me a leg up, any how," said poor Prescott to himself. Then aloud, "If I could gain Emily's—Miss Murray's consent, sir, would you have any objection to me for her husband?"

"Ah, ha! ah, ha! James," laughed the old gentleman in great delight—"got it out at last, eh, my boy?—been beating about the bush this ten minutes. I saw you, I knew what was coming, but I wouldn't help you. You're not so good at this kind of business as your father would have been. The vicar would have had it all out in a minute; and if the girl's father had said no, he'd have

run away with her that night. Desperate fellow Alan is—was, I mean; we're all stupid enough now! And so you want to marry Emily? and you say, if she consents, will I? If she consents?—nonsense, James Prescott! do you think I've forgotten that alphabet? or that it has changed during the last forty years? It's just the same as it was, sir, and I recollect every letter of it! You and Emily have understood each other this long time. No, I've no objection to make. I'd sooner your father's son would marry my daughter than any duke in the land. You've not much money, but I've plenty, and none to care for but her. One thing, how much are you in debt?"

"Not a sixpence."

"On your honour?"

"On my honour."

"That's enough for me! Your father knows of this."

"Not yet, sir. I haven't mentioned it to him; but—"

"But I have! We talked it all over when he was here. So you see we old people are not so blind as you think us. Now, you're dying to go to Emily, and I'm dying to have a nap. Let us oblige each other."

Mr. Prescott did not need a repetition of the hint. In the course of the next two minutes he was in the drawing-room; and the selections from *Lucia*, with which the piano was resounding, were suddenly stopped, and were heard no more until the advent of the old gentleman caused a necessity for candles and calm propriety. I do not think it is necessary for me to reproduce the dialogue which was carried on during the interval. It was very silly and very pleasant; perfectly easy to be imagined, and ought never to be described. Only one bit of it is worth preservation.

"Were you ever in love before, James?"

"Once, dearest; only once in my life." (If he had been the age of old Parr instead of six-and-twenty, he could not have said it with more earnestness.)

"And why did you not marry her?"

"It would not have done, darling. She was not of

our grade in life. It would have been a wretched business. She felt that, and told me so."

"Poor girl, poor girl!" said little Emily; "I wonder where she is now!"

Prescott did not answer. He was too full of his present happiness to think of his former love, who was at that moment lying with her life's breath ebbing fast away.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

“WE KISSED AGAIN WITH TEARS.”

As Frank Churchill advanced into the dining-room in the fading light, he saw Barbara standing by the mantelpiece. Her face was turned towards him, but her eyes were dropped to the ground. She did not raise them as her husband entered, but remained in the same attitude, while he stopped short as the butler closed the door behind him. Frank Churchill was not entirely taken by surprise; he knew that his wife had been staying with her friend Mrs. Schröder, and this fact flashed across him when he first received Kate Mellon's summons: but he thought that she might have left the house; that she might have gone probably to her aunt Miss Loxden—at all events, that there was no earthly reason to prevent him from obeying that summons, and going to one who had always understood that she had a claim upon him. If his wife were there, it was not likely that he would come across her. She had now been absent some weeks from her home, and during that time she had not made the slightest sign, had not shown the least contrition, the least desire for a reconciliation; had not made the smallest advance in any one shape or way; consequently, she would be as opposed to any interview as he could be, and would take care to prevent it. As opposed as he could be? Yes; that was giving it a very definite range; he felt that he could trust himself now under any influence. All that had been ductile within him had gradually been growing hard and rigid; all his love and tenderness, his devotion to and pride in his wife had gradually died out; his very nature seemed to have changed: where he had been trusting, he had become sceptical;

where he had been hopeful, he had become doubtful; where he had been generous, he had become cynical. All his good aspirations, his domestic virtues, seemed to have deserted him. What his mother had fondly hoped, when the separation between husband and wife came,—that her son would be restored to her as he was before his marriage,—never had been realised. For the first few days, fearing the gossip of the world, he came home regularly to the house in Great Adullam Street, where the old lady had been reinstalled; dined, and remained at home during the evening, until he went down to see the proof of his article at the *Statesman* office. But while at home, he was any thing but his old self. In the bygone days he had been full of chat and rattle, keeping his mother alive to all the current gossip of the day, talking to her of new books, new men, new opinions. Now he sat moody and silent over the dinner-table—moody and silent over his meerschaum-pipe after dinner over the fire, resting his chin on his hand, dreaming vaguely of the past, vaguely of the future. Then, after a little time, he began to tire of the sameness, to want excitement and variety, and he commenced to dine at the Retrenchment night after night, sitting long over his wine in the coffee-room, then going up and sitting in the smoke-room until late hours of the night. He never joined tables with any one at dinner; he never gave or accepted any further courtesy with his friends than the interchange of a short nod; but occasionally at night he would launch out into conversation in the smoke-room, where he began to gain some renown as a sayer of harsh sayings and bitter jests.

Yes, this was what remained of the genial, kind-hearted, easy-going Frank Churchill. His friends were in despair. His mother, poor old lady, felt that the state of things now was infinitely worse than when Barbara was in the house; for then, though she only saw her son occasionally, she believed him to be happy; but now she scarcely ever saw him at all, and knew him to be thoroughly wretched. She had no satisfaction in keep-

ing house for him; there was no use in ordering dinner which he did not eat; in "tidying" a house which he did not look at; in hunting up and hustling into order servants who might have been as servile as Eastern slaves, or as insolent as American helps, for all their master cared. The old lady's occupation was gone, and she knew it; she felt even more than ever that her position was lost, that she could not hope to supply the place of her who was absent now, however well she and her son might have got on before his marriage; and she was proportionably miserable and disappointed. George Harding too was greatly annoyed at Frank's conduct. His loyal soul allowed that his friend had been hardly dealt by; but he contended boldly that since Barbara's first false step, Frank had been entirely in the wrong. He contended that the husband should have gone to seek his erring wife, and should have endeavoured, by every means in his power, to bring her back to his home. When you talked of pride and that sort of thing to George Harding in a matter of this kind, he snapped his fingers loudly and said, "stuff!" There was no hint at any crime, at even any lightness of conduct, was there? Well then, there was but one course to pursue. When Frank distinctly refused to follow this advice, Harding shrugged his shoulders and left him to himself; but when he saw the dreary, vapid, aimless life that his friend was pursuing, the change that had come over him in every way, he prayed for an opportunity of once more taking him to task in an affectionate and friendly spirit. This opportunity had not been given, and Harding could find no chance of fault-finding in his friend's work, which, though horribly bitter and slashing, was cleverer than ever.

The noise of the closing door rang drearily through the room, and Barbara keeping silence, Churchill felt it incumbent on him to speak. His throat was quite dry, his lips parched and quivering; but he made an effort, and the words came out. "You sent for me?" he said.

"I did," replied Barbara, still keeping her head bent and her eyes downcast: "I wished to speak with you."

"I am here," said Churchill coldly.

"I wished to tell you that—that I have learned a bitter lesson. I wished to tell you that, only to-night, only within the last few minutes, I have discovered that I have been deceived in—in certain matters that have passed between us—that I have done you—done you wrong."

Churchill merely bowed his head.

"I was present in the next room when what has just passed there took place. I was present, and I heard every word. It was by no chance, by no accident, I heard it; I was there intentionally and for the purpose. When that poor girl now lying there sent for you, I felt assured that I should gain the key to that mystery which ruined our married happiness; I felt assured that I should arrive at a solution of that mystery; and now it is solved. You, who know my pride, may judge what fearful interest that question must have had for me when I descended to such means to gain my ends."

Churchill bowed again, but said not a word.

"I have heard it," continued Barbara—"heard the story from first to last. That poor stricken creature lying there, on what we both know to be her death-bed, is ignorant even of my name, far more of my relationship to you. From her lips I stand convicted of my mistake; from her lips I learn that I have done you an injustice. I asked you to come in here that I might acknowledge this to you." For the first time during the interview, she raised her eyes; they met those of her husband, which were cold and pitiless.

"You are very good; but don't you think your admission comes rather late? Pardon me one minute,"—Barbara had made a sign as though about to speak,—I'll not detain you more than one minute. I wooed you as humbly as any rightminded man could, more humbly than some would think fit and proper; but let that pass. Before I asked you to share my life, I showed you plainly what that life was; I did not withhold one jot of its difficulties, its restrictions, its poverty, if you will. I pointed

out to you plainly and unsparingly the sacrifices you would have to make, certain luxuries—little perhaps in themselves, but difficult to do without, from constant use—which you would have to give up. I put before you what I knew would prove (as it has proved) the fact, that, if you married me, the set of people amongst whom you had always lived would consider you had demeaned yourself, and would give you up. I pointed all this plainly out to you,—did I not?"

"You did."

"And you, having heard it all, and weighed it as much as women with any thing like heart in them do weigh such matters, agreed to link your lot with mine. Good. We married, and I brought you to your home; not a brilliant home by any means, not a fairy bower likely to catch the fancy of a young girl, but still, I make bold to say, a comfortable enough home, and one out of which, mind you, my mother—one of the common-minded, commonplace people so sneered at by your superior race—removed, of her own free will, in order that you might be its sole mistress. You follow me?" he asked, for her head had drooped again and he could not see her face.

She murmured some indistinct answer, and as he looked across he thought he saw the trace of tears upon her cheeks.

"What was the result?" he continued. "From that time out, you began to change. There were great allowances to be made for you, I grant. The place was dull, the house small, the furniture meagre; the persons amongst whom you were thrown strange and entirely different from any you had previously mixed with. But the house was your own; the furniture sufficient for our wants; the people anxious to receive you kindly and hospitably, to make you feel welcome, to do any thing for you for my sake. My mother, in some respects a peculiar woman, came out of the semi-seclusion in which she had lived for years, to show her regard for you; she wanted you to share in that wealth of affection which

she lavished on me; she wanted you to be as much her daughter as I was her son. Did you respond to this in any way? No. Did you try to content yourself with the lot which you had accepted? No. Did you, knowing full well how all were striving for you, endeavour to accommodate yourself to, and make the best of, circumstances? No, no, no! You sit moping and indolent in your house, leaving things to go on as they best can; nursing your grief and disappointment and rage until you see every thing through a distorted medium; you alienate my friends by your undisguised contempt; you affront my mother by openly spurning her proffered affection. All this you do, wilfully or foolishly ignoring the fact that in each and every act you inflict a stab on me—on me, slaving for you, loving you, adoring you!”

“Oh, Frank, Frank!”

“Yet one minute, if you please; I will not detain you longer; I should never have sought this opportunity,”—Barbara winced,—“but having it, I must in self defence avail myself of it to the utmost. Not merely do you pursue the line of conduct I have just described, but you forget yourself and annoy me in a far greater degree. I am told of your constantly receiving visits from a gentleman during the hours of my absence from home. I mention this mildly, and beg you to hint to him to call at some other time. You are offended at this; and after a discussion, I acknowledge I may have been hasty, and the subject is dropped. I take you to a party where you meet some of your old friends; your spirits revive; you are more like your old self than you have been since your marriage; and you walk off, away from all the rest of the party, with this same gentleman, with whom I myself see you in singularly earnest conversation. I again speak to you on this point; you deny that I have any occasion for complaint, and I again give way. And now what return do you make me for my kindness, my trust, my confidence? You accuse me of receiving letters, which as your husband I should not receive: and you demand to know the

purport of the letters, and the name of the writer. I give a general denial to your suspicions ; but as to telling you what you require, my pride —"

"Oh, even you have pride, then ?" said Barbara, with a half-sneer.

"Proper pride ! my honour, if you will,—for my honour was pledged in the matter—forbade it. Then, acting on a wild and miserable impulse,—without one thought or care for me, for yourself, for our name and reputation,—you took a step which has brought misery on my life. You left my house, your home,—left it, and left me to be the talk, the object of the gossip, and the pity of all who heard the wretched story. Not content with that, you come to this house, and I am given to understand that, since you have been here, you have been constantly visited by the man I have before spoken of—Captain Lyster !"

No drooping head now ! Barbara is standing erect as a dart. Her cheeks dead white, her lips compressed, her eyes flaming fire.

"You have been told lies !" she said ; "lies which, were it not to cure your madness, and to show you how weak you are, and how mercilessly you have been played upon, I would scorn to answer ! So these dear delightful people have started that story about me, have they ; have tried to degrade me in my husband's eyes by such a miserable concoction as that ; and my husband has believed them. It is only on a par with the rest of the generous sympathy they have shown me, and like all the rest of their wretched machinations, it has some slight shadow of a foundation. Captain Lyster *has* been here ; has been here frequently,—oh, you need not raise your eyebrows,—it was not to see me he came. I will tell you, in self-defence, what I would not have mentioned otherwise. Ever since Mrs. Schröder's trouble, Captain Lyster has been her kindest and most active friend. Before she was married he took the greatest interest in her ; and it was only her father's incontrovertible desire that she should marry as she did, that prevented him from proposing for

her. More; when you saw us walking together at that garden-party at Uplands, it was of Alice he was speaking; it was to tell me of how her reputation had been imperilled by false and cowardly reports, that he had sought me out; and it was to ask my advice and assistance, to enlist me on her side, that he was so urgent."

"How can I be sure of this?"

"How can you be sure of it! Did I ever tell you a falsehood in my life? You know perfectly well,—you would know, at least, if you had not been blinded by ridiculous jealousy, springing from suspicions artfully sown,—that I am incapable of deceiving you in any way."

"What brought Captain Lyster so frequently to my house, in the early days,—before the garden-party at Uplands, I mean,—and why did he always come when I was away?"

"Shall I tell you what I believe brought Captain Lyster so frequently to your house, Frank Churchill? I did not intend to mention it; I intended to have spared you. Mind you, he never said as much to me,—he is too true and too honourable a gentleman to cast a slur on any one; but I honestly believe that Captain Lyster's visits to me were paid through sheer pity."

"Pity!"

"Ay, pity! He is a keen observer, a shrewd man of the world, for all his rapidity and his drawl; and I firmly believe that he pitied me from his soul. He had known me in other days, recollect; he had seen me when—well, there is no vanity in saying it; you know it as well as I do—when I was thought and made much of; when the world was to me a very light and pleasant place, in which I moved about as one of the favoured ones; when I did not know what it was to be checked or thwarted, and when all paths were made smooth for me. He found me solitary, dull, wretched; in a dreary quarter of the town, which was utterly unknown to me; my only acquaintance, people with whom I had not one single thing in common,—people looking with horror on

all I had been accustomed to enjoy, and enjoying all I had heartily detested. He found me *triste* and low; he thought I was becoming dejected and unhappy; not that I ever told him so, of course,—my pride is as great as his; but he is, as I have said, no fool, and he found it out. What did he do? In the most delicate manner possible, he tried to rouse me, and to show me what source of happiness I had in my new position and in your love. He was the only link between my old and my new life; the only person I used to see, who went among the people with whom I had formerly lived. Was it very extraordinary for a girl to ask news of those with whom the whole of her life had been spent? I used to ask Captain Lyster for such news; and he would give it me, always in the gentlest and most delicate manner; telling me, of course, of gaieties that had taken place, but pointing out how silly they were, and how happy the most fêted girls at them would be to settle down into a calm happy love, such as—such as he thought I possessed."

"Did he say all this?"

"He did; and more—much more. Since I have been here, Alice Schröder has told me that on several occasions when your name has been freely commented upon, Captain Lyster has defended you with the utmost warmth, and with a spirit which one can scarcely imagine so naturally indolent a man to be capable of exercising. More than this: when the unhappy story of our separation became public scandal, I, having hitherto refrained from speaking to Captain Lyster about it, but knowing that he must now have heard all, was about one day to ask his advice. He stopped me at once. 'Pardon me, my dear Mrs. Churchill,' he said; 'this is a topic on which I cannot and must not enter. The time will come when—when it will be all happily settled again; and you would then very much regret having discussed the subject with me. If it should ever be my luck to be married, and I had—as undoubtedly I should have—a dispute with my wife, I would lock the door until we had

settled it, and returned to our usual equable state. Not one living soul should ever be able to jeer me about a matrimonial quarrel.’”

“He was right; God knows he was right!” said Churchill, bitterly.

“And yet this is the man whom you have chosen to misrepresent in such a matter. Believe me, that people unfortunately situated as we are, could have found very few friends with the kind heart, the tact, and delicacy of Captain Lyster.”

And then Barbara, heated and fatigued with her defence, stopped, and her head drooped again, and she was silent. There was an awkward pause; then Churchill said,

“You sent for me to—”

“As I have told you—to confess that I had heard the statement made in the next room, and to admit that I was in error in imagining that those letters came from an improper source.”

Now was Frank Churchill’s time. One kind word from him, and the misery of his life was at an end. But with that strange perversity which not unfrequently is a characteristic of good and clever men, he fell into the snare of saying and doing exactly what he should not.

“And you are prepared to come home—” he commenced, in a hard voice.

“Not if invited in that tone,” broke in Barbara abruptly.

“To come home,” continued Churchill, not noticing the interruption,—“to come home confessing that you were entirely in the wrong, and that you had no shadow of excuse for leaving as you did. To come home—”

“Stop, Frank!” burst out Barbara, unable any longer to control herself; “this is not the way to win a person of my temperament to agree to any measures which you may propose. To come home, confessing this and acknowledging that,—why, you know perfectly that you yourself were equally to blame in the preposterous jealousy which you showed of Captain Lyster! I will con-

fess and acknowledge nothing. I will come home to you as your wife,—to be the first in your regard,—to devote myself to you; but I will make no pledges as to accepting other people's interference, or submitting to—"

"In fact," said Frank, "as to being any thing different from what you were. Now that will not do. Much as—as I may have loved you"—his voice broke here—"I would sooner live away from you than undergo the torture of those last few weeks at home again. It would be better for us both that—well, I will not say more about it. God's will be done! One thing, I shall be able to make you now some definite allowance, on which you can live comfortably without being a burden on your relatives or friends. Sir Marmaduke Wentworth is dead; and I understand from his lawyer that I am a legatee, though to what extent I do not yet know. I had hoped that—"

He was interrupted by a soft knock at the door. Presently the door opened, and the nurse put in her head, with an alarmed expression of face. "Come, come!" said she; "quickly! both of you!" and withdrew.

Frank stopped, and motioned Barbara to pass before him.

"Oh, no!" she exclaimed wildly, clasping her hands and looking piteously into his face; "not into the presence of Death!—we cannot go into the presence of Death with these wild words on our lips, this wicked rage at our hearts! Frank, Frank, my darling! fancy if either of us were summoned while feeling so to each other. It is a horrible madness, this; a wild inexplicable torture; but let it end—oh, let it end! I will pray for forgiveness; I will be humble; I will do all you wish! Oh, Frank, Frank, take me once more to yourself!"

His strong arms are round her once again; once more her head is pillowed on his breast; while between his sobs he says, "Forgive you, my darling! Oh, ought not I also to implore your forgiveness!"

CHAPTER XL.

GOING HOME.

THE room lay in deep shadow, the lamp having been moved behind the screen. On its handsome bracket the Louis-Quatorze ormolu clock ticked solemnly away, registering the death of each minute audibly, and indefinitely forcing itself upon the attention of those sitting by, in connexion with the rapidly-closing earthly career of the sufferer on the bed. She lay there, having again fallen into deep heavy slumber, broken occasionally by a fitful cry, a moan of anguish, then relapsing once more into stertorous breathing and seemingly placid rest. In a large arm-chair close by the head of the bed sat Robert Simmel, his eyes tear-blurred, his cheeks swollen and flushed, his lips compressed, his hands stretched straight out before him and rigidly knit together over his knee. This was the end of it, then; the result of all his hopes and fears, his toiling and his scheming. Just as the prize was in his grasp, it melted into thin air. Bitter, frightfully bitter, as were his reflections at that moment, they were tinged with very little thought of self. Grief, unspeakable grief, plucked at his heartstrings as he looked upon the mangled wreck of the only thing he had ever really cherished in the course of his busy life. There lay the beautiful form which he had seen, so round and plump, swaying from side to side in graceful inflections, with every movement of her horse, now crushed out of shape and swathed with bandages and splints. The fair hair, which he recollected tightly knotted under the comely hat, lay floating over the pillow dank with

death-dew; the strong white hands, against the retaining grasp of which the fieriest horses had pulled and plunged in vain, lay helpless on the coverlet, cut and scored by the gravel, and without an infant's power in them. A fresh burst of tears clouded Robert Simnel's eyes as he looked on this sad sight; and his heart sunk within him as he felt that his one chance in life, his one chance of love and peace and happiness, was rapidly vanishing before him. Then the expression of his face changed, his eyes flashed, he set his teeth, and drove his nails into the palms of his hands; for in listening to poor Kate's incoherent exclamations and broken phrases, Simnel had gathered sufficient to give him reason to suspect that she had met Beresford, and that he had somehow or other,—whether intentionally or not, Simnel could not make out,—been connected with, if not the primary cause of, the accident. And then Simnel's chest heaved, and his breath came thick, and he inwardly swore that he would be revenged on this man, who, to the last, had proved himself the evil genius of her who once so fondly loved him.

When Barbara and Frank entered the room together, Simnel looked up, and the bad expression faded out of his face. He, in common with the rest of the world, had heard some garbled story of the separation, and he saw at a glance that poor Kitty's accident had been the means of throwing them together again, and of effecting a reconciliation. What he had just heard from the girl's mouth of Churchill had inspired in him a sense of gratitude and regard; and as he noticed Barbara clinging closely to her husband's arm, as she threw a half-frightened glance towards the bed, he felt himself dimly acknowledging the mysterious workings of that Providence, which, in its own good time, brings all things to their appointed end.

Frank and Barbara, after casting a hurried look at the bed, had seated themselves on the other side; the nurse, tired out with watching, had drawn her large chair close to the fire and fallen into that horrible state

of nodding and catching herself up again, of struggling with sleep, then succumbing, then diving forward with a nod and pulling herself rigid in an instant—a state so common in extra-fatigue; and Simnel had dropped into his old desolate attitude. So they sat, no one speaking. Ah, the misery of that watching in a sick-room! the solemn silence scarcely broken by the ticking of the clock, the crackling of the fire, the occasional dropping of the coals, the smothered hum of wheels outside; the horrible thoughts that at such times get the mastery of the mind and riot in full sway,—thoughts of the sick person there being watched, doubts as to the chances of their recovery, wonderings as to whether they themselves are conscious of their danger, as to whether they are what is commonly called “prepared” to die. Then a dreamy state, in which we begin to wonder when we shall be in similar extreme plight; and where? Shall we have had time for the realisation of those schemes which now so much occupy us, or shall we be cut off suddenly? Shall we outlive Tom and Dick and Harry, who are now our intimates; or will they eat cake and wine before they step into the mourning-coach, and canvass our character, and be tenderly garrulous on our foibles? Shall we be able to bear it calmly and bravely when the doctor makes that dread announcement, and tells us that if we have any earthly affairs to settle, it were best to do it at once; for it is impossible to deny that there is a certain amount of danger, &c. &c. And the boys, with life before them, and no helping, guiding hand to point out the proper path? Ah, Tom and Dick and Harry, our old friends, boon-companions, trusted intimates, they surely would have the heart to look after the children? And the wife, dearest helpmate, true in all her wifely duties, but ah! how unfitted to combat with the world, to have the responsibilities of the household to bear alone? And then the end itself!—the Shadow-cloaked from head to foot! the great hereafter! “Behold, we know not any thing!” Happy are we to arouse from that dismal reverie at the sound of the wheels

of the doctor's carriage, and gaze into his eyes, trusting there to read a growing hope.

The reflections of the four persons assembled round poor Kate Mellon's sick-bed were not entirely of this kind. The minds of Frank and Barbara were naturally full of all that had just occurred, in which they were most interested; full of thoughts of past storms and future happiness—full of such pleasurable emotions, that the actual scene before them had but a minor influence. Simmel was pondering over his shattered idol and his dreams of vengeance; while the nurse, when for a few seconds' interval between her naps she roused herself sufficiently to think at all, was full of a cheering consciousness of earning eighteenpence a-day more in her present place than in one in which she had been previously. And then came the sound of the wheels and the smothered knock, and then the gentle opening of the door, and Mr. Slade's pleasant presence in the room.

He approached the bed, and surveyed the sleeper; crossed the room with the softest footsteps, and asked a few whispered questions of the nurse; then turned quietly back, and seated himself by Frank and Barbara.

"How do you find her?" asked the latter.

Mr. Slade simply shook his head, without making any verbal reply.

"The nurse summoned us hurriedly about half-an-hour ago," whispered Churchill; "but when we came in, we found her in the state in which you now see her; she has not moved since, scarcely."

"Poor child! poor child!" said Mr. Slade, plying his pocket-handkerchief very vigorously; "she'll not move much more."

"Is she—is she very bad to-night?" asked Barbara.

"Yes, my dear," said the old gentleman, taking a large pinch of snuff to correct his emotion; "yes, my dear, she is very bad, as you would say. There is a worn pinched look in her face which is unmistakable. She is going home rapidly, poor girl!"

The sense of the last observation, though he had not

heard the words, seemed to have reached Mr. Simnel's ears, for he rose hurriedly, and crossing to Mr. Slade, took him by the arm and led him on one side.

"Did you say she was dying?" he asked in a hoarse whisper, when they had moved some distance from the rest.

"I did not say so, though I implied it," said the old man; then peering at him from under his spectacles, "May I ask are you any relation of the lady's?"

"No, no relation; only I—I was going to be married to her, that was all." He said these words in a strange hard dry voice; and Mr. Slade felt him clutch his wrist tight as he went on to say, "Is there no hope? You won't take amiss what I say; I know your talent and your position; but still in some cases, a second opinion—if there is any thing that money can do—"

"My dear sir," said Mr. Slade, "I understand perfectly what you mean; and God knows if there were any thing to be done, I wouldn't stand in the way; but in this case, if you had the whole College of Surgeons before you, and the gold-fields of Australia at your back, there could be but one result."

Mr. Simnel bowed his head, while one great shiver ran through his frame. Then he looked up and said, "And when?"

"Immediately—to-night; in two or three hours at most. She will probably rouse from this lethargy, have some moments of consciousness, and then—"

"And then?"

Mr. Slade made no direct answer, but he shrugged his shoulders and turned on his heel. Silently he shook hands with Barbara and Churchill, then with Simnel, placing one hand on his shoulder, and gripping him tightly with the other; then he walked to the bed, and bent over it, peering into poor Kitty's puckered face, while two large tears fell on the coverlet. Then he stooped and lightly kissed the hand which lay outstretched, and then hurried noiselessly from the room. Mr. Slade saw several patients that night before going to a scientific

conversazione at the Hanover-Square Rooms—a noble lord, who had softening of the brain, and who passed his days in a big arm-chair, and made a moaning noise, and wept when turned away from the fire; a distinguished commoner, who had given way to brandy, and was raving in delirium; and a young gentleman, who, in attempting to jump the mess-room table after dinner, had slipped, and sustained a compound fracture of his leg. But at each of these visits he was haunted by the pallid tortured face of the dying girl. At the *conversazione* it got between the microscope and a most delicious preparation; and was by his side as he drew on his nightcap and prepared for his hard-earned slumbers.

Slowly, slowly wore away the night: Simnel still sat rigid and erect; but the nurse was sound asleep, and Barbara's head had drooped upon Frank's shoulder, when suddenly the room rang with a shrill startling cry. In an instant all rushed to the bedside. There lay Kate awake, but still under the influence of some dreadful dream.

"Keep him off! keep him off!" she cried. "It's unfair, it's cowardly, Charley! I'm a woman, and you hit so hard! Oh, Robert," she exclaimed, vainly endeavouring to drag herself towards Simnel, "you'll keep him off! you'll defend me!"

"There's no one there, Kate," said Simnel, dropping on his knees by the bedside, and taking her hand; "there's no one to hurt you, my child."

"I was dreaming then," said Kate; "oh, such a horrid dream! I thought I—— Who are these?" she exclaimed, looking at Barbara and Frank. "I'm scarcely awake yet, I think. Why, it's Guardy, of course! and you, dear, who were so kind to me. But how are you here together? I can't make that out."

"This is my wife, Kate," said Churchill; "my wife, of whom you were speaking this evening."

"Your wife! ah, I'm so glad; I never thought of that; I never thought of asking her who she was; I only knew she was, oh, so kind and so affectionate with me;

and it was because she was your wife, eh? Will you kiss me again, dear? So; and again! What a sweet soft face it is! Ah, he's been so good to me, dear, this husband of yours; and I've given him such trouble for so many years. So grave and so steady he's always been, that I've looked upon him as quite an old fellow, and never thought of his marrying. I—I'm much weaker to-night, I think; the pain seems to have left my side; but I feel so weak, as though I couldn't raise a finger. You're there, Robert?"

"Yes, dear."

"Ay, I feel your hand-grip now! You must not mind what I'm going to say, Robert; you took on so before; but you'll be brave now, eh, Robert? I—I know I'm going home—to my long home, I mean; and I want to say how happy, and peaceful, and grateful to the Lord, I am. I've often thought of this time—often and often; and wondered—and I've often thought it would be like this, and yet not quite in this way. You used to talk to me about my rashness, Guardy,—in riding, I mean."

"Yes, dear Kate; and you always promised, and you never did, my headstrong child!"

"No, Guardy, I didn't, and yet I tried hard; but I hadn't much pleasure otherwise, had I? Robert knows that; and I *did* so enjoy my work! I've often thought it might come when I was with the hounds, and that would have been dreadful! All the business and bother in the field, and carried away somewhere, to some wretched place, where there'd have been no one near to care for me; and now I've you all here, and that kind old doctor; and, oh, thank God for all!"

There was a little pause, and then she asked in, if any thing, a weaker voice, "What's become of the horse? does any one know?—the horse, I mean, that did this?"

"He was taken home, Kate; so Freeman said. He's a good deal cut; but—"

"Oh, don't let him come to grief, Robert! It wasn't his fault, poor fellow! He was startled by the—ah, well;

it's all over now! Don't frown so, Robert; I ought to have known better. Lord Clonmel always said he had a temper of his own; but I thought I could do any thing, and—Some of them will crow over this, won't they? Those Jeffrey girls, who always said I was a park-rider, and no good at fencing, eh? Well, well, that's neither here nor there. You know all about the will, Guardy,—in the desk, you know? and what I said about your having—and Freeman—and the men's wages; and—”

As she spoke she sunk back, and seemed to fall asleep at once. The nurse, who had been hovering round, advanced and looked anxiously at her, laying her finger on her pulse, and peering into her face. Reassured, she retired again; and the others, save Simnel, who still remained kneeling by the bed, resumed their places. Then, stretched supine, and without addressing herself to any one, Kate Mellon began to talk again. Fragmentary, disconnected, incoherent sentences they were that she uttered; but, listening to them, Simnel and Frank Churchill managed to make out that her head was wandering, and that she was running through passages of her earlier life.

“Ready!” she said. “All right, Dolphin! Now, band!—why don't they play up? No hoop lit yet! Get along, Dolphin! Ribbons now! Stand up, man!—why doesn't that man stand up? So; give him his head—that's it! Chalk; more chalk!—this pad's so slippery, I shall never stand on it; and—that's better. Now we go—one, two, three! All right, sir; all right, madam; told you I should clear it. Ah, Charley! Hold the hoop lower—lower yet. What's he at? I shall miss it—miss it! and then—Slacken your curb, miss, or she'll rear! So; that's it—easy does it. Courage now,—head and the heart up; hand and the heel down! Oh, he's jumped short!—he's over! he's over!”

She gave a sharp cry, and half-raised herself on to the pillow. The nurse was by her in an instant; so were they all. Her eyes opened at first dreamily; then she looked round and smiled sweetly. “Kiss me, dear,” she

said to Barbara. "Guardy! Robert, Robert! kindest, dearest Robert, I'm—going home!"

Then, with tears streaming from both their eyes, Frank led Barbara away; while, haggard and rigid, Simnel knelt by the bedside firmly clutching a dead hand.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE DAY AFTER.

WHEN Mr. Simnel woke on the morning succeeding the night of Kate Mellon's death, he felt a numbness in his limbs, a burning, throbbing pain in his head, and a general sensation of prostration. He made an attempt at getting up, thinking he would string himself into vigour with his cold bath; but he found his head whirling—his legs shaking; and, after a severe shivering fit, he was fain to forego the attempt, and to get into bed again. Then he rang his bell, and told his servant to ask Dr. Prater to step round at once, and then to go on to Mr. Scadgers, whom he was to bring back with him. The servant despatched, Mr. Simnel lay back in bed, and endeavoured to give himself up to reflection. But the events of the last twenty-four hours had been far too exciting for that; still lay stretched before his eyes the crushed and mangled figure of his loved one; still her last broken words rung upon his ears.

“‘Dearest, kindest Robert!’ she called me that—my darling called me that with her last breath. ‘Dearest, kindest Robert!’—the last words! never to see her any more—never to hear her voice again! All over now; all—No, not all; one thing to be done, and done at once—a settlement with Charles Beresford!”

Simnel smiled very grimly as this idea came into his mind. It was not the first time that the idea had occurred to him. As, bit by bit, he gleaned poor Kitty's incoherent story, as he knelt by her bed, he had rapidly framed his course of action, and indeed carried it out in his mind. He saw himself thrashing Beresford in the

streets—saw the row that would take place thereon consequent, the desperate confusion at the Tin-Tax Office; and, through the perspective, had a distant vision of a long stretch of sand on the Calais coast—he and Beresford fronting each other as principals, a couple of soldiers from the neighbouring *caserne* as seconds, and an army medical man looking on. He knew that Beresford was a man of courage; but he thought that he would probably refuse to fight in such an affair as this; therefore Simnel determined that no option should be given. He would not have a friend of his wait on Beresford with a challenge. He (Simnel) would pick a quarrel with him on some frivolous pretext, and insult him in the street. That was what he had made up his mind to do, and that was what he had intended to do that very day, if his sudden indisposition had not prevented him.

Little Dr. Prater found his patient very restless and tolerably impatient. "Well, my dear sir, and how are we? Glad I was at home, and able to come round at once. A fortunate chance to catch me, for there is a *great* deal of sickness just now amongst the upper classes. The tongue? Thank you. The pulse? Ah; dear me, dear me! as I feared—a galloping pulse, my dear sir, and a high state of fever! Have you now—have you had any cause for excitement?"

"Yes," said Simnel, shortly; "I was last night at the deathbed of one very dear to me."

"To be sure, my dear sir; how came I to forget it!—Miss Kate Mellon's. Oh, my dear sir, of course I heard of it,—I hear every thing,—at least, I heard of her being very ill—impossible to live. Slade attended, didn't he? Ah, couldn't have a better man. One of the rough diamonds of our profession, my dear sir; not polished, but—all here!" and the little doctor laid his forefinger on his forehead. "And so she's gone, poor young lady! Well, well! Now, my dear sir, it's my duty to prescribe for you the utmost quietude. The least bit of excitement may be highly prejudicial; in fact, I would not answer for the consequences."

"When shall I be able to go out?" asked Simnel impatiently.

"Go out, my dear sir! Not for several days—perhaps longer. I will send in a nurse to look after you; for you must be carefully watched, and have your medicines at stated times; and I'll look in this evening. Mind, my dear sir, perfect quiet."

After letting out the doctor, the servant returned to his master.

"Mr. Scadgers is here, sir," said he.

"Then show him in," said Simnel, from the bed.

"Beg your pardon, sir; but the doctor's last words to me was that you was to see nobody but the nuss."

"Are you the doctor's servant, or mine, sir? Show him in!" and in Mr. Scadgers was shown.

"Hallo, sir!" said that worthy, regarding Mr. Simnel; "this is bad news to find you ill."

"There's worse than that, Scadgers; a good deal worse; as you'll hear. Your niece,—Kate Mellon, you know,—about whom we've had all the talk lately—"

"Ay, I know; at the Runner's—I know—well?"

"Dead."

"Dead!" repeated Scadgers, with a blanched face—"dead! how? when?"

"Last night; thrown from her horse; had some row with a man named Beresford in the Park; horse was frightened; bolted, and fell with her. It was this cursed Beresford's fault, and—"

"What Beresford is it?"

"Charles Beresford of my office,—Commissioner, you know. I'll make him remember that day's work; I'll post him at his club; I'll horsewhip him in the street; I'll—I'd have done it to-day, but for this—this cold."

"Charles Beresford, eh? And it's him that killed my niece, is it? Horsewhip him, eh? you won't be able to leave your room yet; it's more than a cold you've got, if I may judge by the look of your face and the hot feel of your hands. Charles Beresford, eh? Ay, ay! ay, ay!"

"I'm afraid you're right, Scadgers," said Simnel. "I

begin to feel deuced bad, much worse than when I woke. And to be lying here while that scoundrel will be getting safe away—out of my reach!”

“What do you mean, getting away?”

“Why, he’s off to the Continent! I myself recommended him to go there, to lie quiet until his difficulties blew over; and he’ll be off at once,—to-night or to-morrow.”

“Will he, by Jove! no, no! don’t you flurry yourself, sir. I’ll put a stopper on that. Charles Beresford shall be here whenever you want him, I’ll take my oath. Excuse me now; look in and see you to-morrow.” And despite Mr. Simmel’s calling to him, Mr. Scadgers rushed off at the top of his speed.

Mr. Scadgers, albeit of a stout figure, and ill-adapted for exercise, never ceased running until he ran into his own office in Berners Street, when he sat himself down and fairly panted for breath. When he had recovered a little, he called to him the wondering Jinks, and said, “How does Beresford—Charles Beresford—stand with us?”

The little man thought for a minute, and then said, “About a hundred-and-thirty-seven on renewal; due the fifteenth next month.”

“What’s his figure with Parkinson?”

“Between eight and nine hundred; dessay more’an a thousand—renewals, judges’ orders, all sorts of things in that lot. Parkinson’s clerk was here yesterday, talking about it amongst other things.”

“Very good. Now look here, Jinks; you jump into a cab, and bowl away to Parkinson’s as hard as you can split. Tell him the game’s up; that I’ve just learnt Master Beresford’s going to hook it abroad. Let Parkinson, or his chief clerk, run down and swear this before the judge in chambers,—affidavy, you know,—and then let him instruct Sloman’s people to collar Master Beresford at once.”

“You want this done?”

“Most certainly I do; and rely on you to have it

done at once. Look here, Jinks, you know me: Beresford must be quodded to-night!"

"All right; look upon it as settled."

"And more than that: learn, if you can, who holds his paper besides Parkinson, and to what amount; and bring me a list. Tell Parkinson that I've a feeling in this beyond mere business, and he'll understand. And bring me the list of the others."

Mr. Jinks nodded acquiescence and departed. As he went out of the door, Mr. Scadgers rubbed his grimy hands together, and muttered, "Better than all your horsewhippings and shootings. Master Beresford's broke up root and branch,—stock, lock, and barrel. I'll never leave him now until I've crushed him out. Insult my poor niece, did he? better have put his head in the fire at once!"

That afternoon, as Mr. Beresford walked jantly from the Tin-Tax Office, he was arrested on the *ne-exeat-regno* affidavit of William Parkinson, gentleman, attorney-at-law, and conveyed to the mansion of Mr. Sloman in Cursitor Street, at which pleasant house detainers to the amount of nearly five thousand pounds were lodged in the course of the following day.

Mr. Scadgers, going to communicate his cheering intelligence to Mr. Simmel, found the portion of Piccadilly opposite that gentleman's door thickly strewn with tan, and asking Dr. Prater, whom he met on the threshold, for news of his patient, was informed that Mr. Simmel had a severe attack of brain-fever, and that at that moment the doctor would not answer for the result.

According to appointment, Frank Churchill presented himself at Mr. Russell's offices in Lincoln's Inn; Mr. Russell, whose firm had been solicitors to the Wentworths from time immemorial, and who himself had enjoyed all the confidence of the late baronet. The old gentleman, clad in his never-varying rusty black, and still as desirous as ever to hide his hands under his coat-sleeves, received Frank in his usual icy manner, and

bade him sit down. "I have here," said he, "a letter for you from the late Sir Marmaduke Wentworth, with the contents of which I am not acquainted; but which refers, I believe, to the will, a copy of which I also have here. Be good enough to read it, and see whether you require any information."

Frank broke the seal, and read the following, written in a trembling hand:

"Pau, Pyrenees, October.

"MY DEAR PROFESSOR,

"Two lines, to tell you two things: I'm dying—that's one; I've always honoured and respected, and recently I've liked, you—that's the other. They tell me you're a deuced-clever fellow—which is nothing to me. I've proved you to be a gentleman—which is every thing. I wish you were my son and my heir; but I can't make you either. I haven't got any son, and my heir is my nephew—I've no doubt a very respectable fellow; a parson, who collects sea-anemones and other filths, in dirty water and a glass-bowl—a harmless fellow enough, but not in my line. All I've been able to do is to leave you five thousand pounds, which Russell, or some of them, will see that you're paid. Don't be squeamish about taking it. I owe it you. I never gave you a mug when you were christened. My love to your dear wife. God bless you!

"MARMADUKE WENTWORTH."

When he had finished the reading of this characteristic epistle, he told Mr. Russell of its purport; and heard from the old gentleman that the legacy named therein had been provided for by the will. Then Frank returned to Saxe-Coburg Square, and settled with Mrs. Schröder and Barbara that they should at once leave for Brighton, whither, after poor Kitty's funeral, he would follow them.

CHAPTER XLII.

AND LAST.

MR. SIMNEL was very ill indeed. Dr. Prater looked monstrous grave, and began to talk about 'responsibility;' so they summoned other two physicians high in esteem, who exchanged snuff-boxes, and looked out of window together, and examined Dr. Prater's prescriptions through a gold double-eyeglass and a pair of spectacles, and agreed that his treatment of the case was every thing that could be wished, and declined to commit themselves to any opinion as to whether the patient might get better or not. Frank Churchill remaining in town until after the funeral of poor Kate Mellon, and expecting some suggestions from Mr. Simnel as to how and where the last rites should be performed, called on that gentleman at his chambers in Piccadilly, and discovered the state of affairs. Then Churchill, while he remained in London, took to coming every day to see Mr. Simnel, and to learn whether any thing was required for him; and, coming in to pay a farewell visit after he had seen poor Kitty laid in the grave, he met Dr. Prater, and heard from his lips that in all human probability the actual danger was past, but that it might be months before the patient would be himself again, so dreadfully had he been weakened and pulled down. So Churchill went away in better spirits, leaving his address at Brighton, in case Mr. Simnel required any thing done which Churchill could do for him. Indeed Frank wanted a little rest and repose. As though his own domestic worries had not been enough for him, he had had to supervise the whole of the mortuary and testamentary arrangements of poor Kate Mellon; and one

other bit of business he had had to perform, of a somewhat more pleasing character.

In coming back in all humility to her husband's arms, Barbara had made no stipulations; but when, holding her clasped in his strong embrace, he was talking of her return home, she looked up imploringly in his face, and said,

"Oh, if possible, not to the old street! oh, Frank, let us retrench in any way, but do let us leave that horrible neighbourhood!"

All things considered, he too thought it better; and as Sir Marmaduke's legacy had materially increased his income, he felt himself justified in looking out for some pretty suburban place, and half his days had been spent at house-agents' offices, and in explorations of houses to which he had been remitted.

Mr. Simnel's illness did not concern himself alone, but reflected immediately on the Tin-Tax Office. For at that eminent establishment things had been so long dependent on the one man, that so soon as he was taken away, unmistakable symptoms of collapse began to show themselves, and it seemed impossible that the business could be carried on. For in the discharge of the business of the Tin-Tax Office the grand thing was for every body to refer to every body else, until the whole onus of setting the machine in gear, of supplying steam-power, and starting the engine, fell upon Mr. Simnel; and when he was not there to start it, it went off in a very lame and one-sided manner. This was perceived by "one of the public," one of those wondrous persons who, with nothing to do, are always on the look-out to see Achilles' heel uncovered, or to spy the joints in Atrides' armour; and the person in question, who had been overcharged eighteenpence in a matter of tin-tax, and who had received, in reply to an appeal, a letter from the Office in which the relative ignored the existence of an antecedent, and the verb positively declined any connexion with the nominative case, sent the letter to the *Daily Teaser*, where it was found so charming, that a leading article in the richest

and fullest-flavoured style of that journal was specially devoted to it. This article was much quoted; and at the end of the week the subject was honoured by the *Scourge* with a yet more ferocious attack. The *Scourge* article happened to be read by the Treasury Secretary on Sunday morning as he was dressing, and that astute official at once saw that something was wrong. Early the next morning his private secretary called at the Tin-Tax Office and learnt of Simnel's illness—learned moreover that he had applied for six months' leave of absence, thorough and entire rest and change being reported as absolutely necessary in the certificate. The next man, a political nominee, was worth nothing; and of the Commissioners none of them had the least notion of business save Sir Hickory Maddox, who was past his work, and Mr. Beresford, who had—well, there was no doubt about it, all town was ringing with it—gone entirely to the bad on racing matters, and was at that very time in Whitecross-Street Prison. The Treasury Secretary was in a fix; he saw that the matter was becoming serious; that the Tin-Tax—an important department—was going to grief; that some member was safe to ask a question about the mismanagement in the first week of the session; and that therefore what he the Treasury Secretary had to do—and a deuced unpleasant job it was, too—was to tell the Chancellor of the Exchequer how matters stood, and wait for orders. The Chancellor of the Exchequer received the news with a very bad grace; he was a nervous man and hated newspaper-attacks; he was a strictly moral man and hated looseness of any kind. He told the Treasury Secretary that Mr. Beresford must be written to to resign his situation at once, or he would be removed; and he stated that he was thoroughly sick of nepotism and 'influence' in the choice of nominees, and that a man must be selected to fill Beresford's berth, on whom they might really depend for the working of the department during Simnel's absence.

It was the result of these instructions that George Harding found himself in Downing Street, in obedience

to a strongly-worded invitation, glaring over an old red despatch-box at the Treasury Secretary, and receiving from him the offer of that vacant berth. It was the result of his own honesty and straightforwardness that he declined it. "It wouldn't do, Sir George; it wouldn't do. I'm cut out for a newspaper-man, and nothing else; though I deeply feel the honour you've done me. No; I must decline; but I know a man who would be exactly what you require; who—"

"Pardon me, Mr. Harding; I was only instructed to sound you as to yourself; and—"

"Pardon *me*, you know the man of whom I am speaking well enough; he wrote those articles on the Russian question, for which Lord Hailey supplied the material, and with which he was so pleased."

"Ah, to be sure; I recollect; what's his name? one may make a note of him, at any rate."

"His name is Churchill. You'll find no better clearer-headed man."

Then George Harding went away, and for the first and last time in his life exerted his influence, and requested the return of favours which he had frequently granted. He must have been well satisfied with the result of his work. Three days after Harding's interview with the Treasury Secretary, Churchill, idling at Brighton, was telegraphed for to Downing Street. The next week the *London Gazette* contained the appointment of Francis Churchill, Esquire, to be one of the Commissioners appointed for levying her Majesty's Tin-Tax, *vice* Charles Beresford, Esquire, retired.

Mr. Beresford, pursued with the most unrelenting animosity by Scadgers, found himself opposed at every step,—even when, in sheer despair, he petitioned the Court,—and opposed so successfully, that he was remanded for two years. This period he passed in prison, and in cultivating the mysteries of rackets, *écarté*, and *piquet*, in the two last of which he became a great proficient. It is to be hoped that they will be of service to

him on the Continent, whither, having eventually obtained his release, he has repaired; and where his gentlemanly bearing and knowledge of the world will probably enable him to earn a very decent income from the innocent young Englishmen always to be picked up in travelling.

Mr. Prescott married Miss Murray, and, for a time, lived in London, and attended his office with great regularity. But the old squire found he could not live without his daughter, and simultaneously discovered that it was absolutely necessary that his estate should be more closely looked after than it had been. So, at his father-in-law's desire, Mr. Prescott resigned his appointment, and took up his quarters at Brooklands, where he and his wife are thoroughly happy; and where he discharges his duties of shooting, fishing, and hunting, to his own and his wife's great satisfaction. They have two sturdy children; a girl Kate, to whom Mr. Simnel is sponsor, and a boy Jim, who, under the guidance of his godfather Mr. Pringle, is already being indoctrinated into all kinds of mischief.

Dear honest old George Pringle is still single. "Time, sir," he sometimes says to Prescott, "has bereft me of charms once divine," laying his hand on a bald place about the size of a shilling on the crown of his head; "but I defy him. I and Madame Rachel are the only people who are 'beautiful for ever.'" He is very happy, having risen well in his office, and he still hates Mr. Dibb with all the intensity of former years.

Mr. Simnel, after some months, came back cured of his illness, but quite an altered man; his hair had become quite white, and his back was bowed like that of a very old man. Occasionally he goes down to see his colleague Mr. Churchill, or to spend Saturday and Sunday with Mr. Prescott's family; but his ordinary life is a very quiet one, and seems divided between his office and the True-Blue Club, in the card-room of which he is to be found every night prepared to hold his own at whist against all comers.

Mr. Scadgers still pursues his trade; but I hear that he is now considering the advances of a joint-stock company, who wish to buy his business, under the title of The Government-Clerks' Own Friend and Unlimited Advance Company (limited), and who propose to make Jinks manager with a large salary.

There is no Mrs. Schröder now, and no house appertaining to any one of that name in Saxe-Coburg Square. Captain and Mrs. Lyster live in a large house at Maidenhead, known to their friends as "The Staircase," from the enormous size of the *escalier*, but really known as Wingroves,—a fine old-fashioned Queen-Anne mansion, facing the river, where they are thoroughly happy. Their son Fred is supposed by his parents to be a prodigy, and is really a healthy pleasant boy.

Near them is a little cottage with a trim garden, passing by which in the summer you will generally see a white-haired old lady, on a rustic seat, reading a book and enjoying the sunlight.

Then comes a shout, a clanging of the garden-gate, an irruption of children, wild cries of "Granny!" and the old lady is hustled away to find fruit or play at games. This is old Mrs. Churchill, who has never been so happy in her life.

And Barbara and Frank? They live close by in a charming house, with a lawn sloping to the Thames. Barbara has her brougham again; and all her old acquaintances have called on her, and expressed their delight at her husband's good fortune with great enthusiasm. Miss Lexden, now resident in Florence, and a confirmed invalid, is perhaps the only one of her old set who has not so acted. But Barbara has not cared to renew the old connexions. Thoroughly happy in her husband, doting on her three children, her chief pleasure is in her home, of which she is now the comfort and the pride.

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